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Saying the World Anew: A Philosophical Understanding of Communication as Testimony

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SAYING THE WORLD ANEW:

A PHILOSOPHICAL UNDERSTANDING OF COMMUNICATION AS TESTIMONY

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In memory of my mother, these words and all the others.

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Nevertheless, I shall try to name a few:

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I could not have done this without the support of my friends, both near and far. Indeed, I remain perplexed as to how I am worthy such a magnanimous group of individuals. Your confidence in my pursuits and endless encouragement has made all of this possible and worthwhile. I could never finish an account of all you have done, but I am hopeful you know. From the Midwest, a special thank you to Ashton Mouton whose friendship kept everything in the proper perspective. And from the desert: Katie Kitchen and Nicole Quezada, who have been with me since the beginning and never once wavered in their support.

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Finale. – The only philosophy which can be responsibly practiced in the face of despair is the attempt to contemplate all things as they would present themselves from the standpoint of redemption. Knowledge has no light but that shed on the world by redemption: all else is reconstruction, mere technique. Perspectives must be fashioned that displace and estrange the world…The more passionately thought denies its conditionality for the sake of the unconditional, the more unconsciously, and so calamitously, it is delivered up to the world. Even its own impossibility must at last comprehend for the sake of the possible. But beside the demand thus placed on thought, the question of the reality or the unreality of redemption itself hardly matters.

Adorno, *Minima Moralia*

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ABSTRACT

Sturgess, Jessica N. Ph.D., Purdue University, August 2016. Saying the World Anew: A Philosophical Understanding of Communication as Testimony. Major Professors: Patrice M. Buzzanell and Daniel W. Smith.

This study develops a philosophy of communication by investigating the crisis of directionality that follows from the dissolution of foundationalist metaphysics. Drawing from fundamental ontology and philosophical hermeneutics, this project suggests we shift our understanding of communication as a process of information exchange toward communication as an enactment of testimony. This leads to an examination of the rhetorical figure of hyperbole. It is argued that hyperbole offers unique insight into the ground of communication as all communicative acts are, in their ontological structure, hyperbolic. Moreover, this hyperbolic characterization of communication highlights the role of excess, inexpressibility, risk, and extravagance central to communicative praxis. To illustrate this, a reading of three figures in American Transcendentalism—Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Walt Whitman—is offered. By thinking communication as testimony, as a making sense in common, the relationship between communication and a radical democracy to come is brought into relief.

CHAPTER 1. OPENING

In what follows I offer a philosophy of communication at the boundaries of disciplinarity. Philosophy and communication have long been neighborly, especially given the nearly simultaneous emergence of rhetoric and philosophy in the ancient Greek context. As Calvin O. Schrag and David James Miller have argued, philosophy and communication have been in a state of "convergence without coincidence."[1] In other words, the study of communication and the study of philosophy are inextricably linked in the kinds of questions each asks, even if historically they have found themselves in spirited disagreement during the unfolding of disciplines within the development of the modern university system. We must be careful to clarify what we mean by philosophy of communication.[2] Too often when we hear of "philosophy of" X, it means deploying the

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[1] Calvin O. Schrag and David James Miller, "Communication Studies and Philosophy: Convergence without Coincidence," in *The Critical Turn: Rhetoric and Philosophy in Postmodern Discourse*, eds. Ian Angus and Lenore Langsdorf (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1993).

[2] Throughout this project I will use "we." Although this we is not particularly royal, it is richly meaningful in particular ways. First, we functions to acknowledge that I am never only myself; to speak in the singular is always already to speak in the plural. I speak only because I dwell within language as the shared opening of world disclosure that makes any historical language possible. Moreover, I speak within a context set forth by others—the we indicates their contribution as much as my own and demonstrates the circumstances into which my voice has room to be heard. Third, the we marks the relationship between myself and the reader. Together we are attempting to develop a horizon of understanding. Finally, the we signifies those who think as I do, that is, other scholars who are indebted to the same philosophical movements and projects as I am. Where necessary I have tried to structure my claims so that which we is at issue is made clear.

resources of philosophy to explore an area of human activity outside of philosophy itself; for example, philosophy of religion, philosophy of the social sciences, and the like. To be sure, this project draws heavily from the philosophical tradition and the resources it offers, but it does so by giving equal attention to the experience of communication as it is embodied and lived. In particular, this project attempts to merge philosophy, understood as a way of life, with communicative ethics, understood as the practice of negotiating a world in common.

To undertake this task, I wish to take as our point of departure a claim by the late French philosopher Jacques Derrida. This claim will serve as an opening in a dual sense: it is the idea with which this project begins and attempts to trace throughout, but it is also an insight that I am hopeful will position us to understand communication anew. Although this dissertation is not itself a project in deconstruction, it draws from the insights deconstruction offers. By this I mean that I will draw inspiration from deconstruction as a philosophical movement but I do not aim to add to the literature on deconstruction and its relation to communication.[3] Rather, this project aims to complicate our everyday understanding of communication and ethics and enrich it with the virtues of hyperbole. Hyperbole, we shall come to see, is at work in a philosophical approach to communication and functions as a figure through which we can come to conceptualize communication otherwise as a practice of testimony. Said differently, this work

[3] For an excellent account of the resources deconstruction offers to thinking communication philosophically, see Briankle Chang, *Deconstructing Communication: Representation, Subject, and Economies of Exchange* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

highlights the hyperbolic elements at work in communication as testimony and enriches what the concept has to offer both philosophy and communication studies.

Let us turn then to Derrida's provocation. In a dialogue with several scholars he offers the following insight (or incite): "*Testimony, which implies faith or promise, governs the entire social space*."[4] In coming to understand this provocation we might open ourselves to a new horizon of meaning with regard to the practice of communicative ethics.

Before we fully appreciate what is at work in Derrida's provocation, we need to step back and see the larger context within which Derrida would utter such a claim. Deconstruction is philosophy that takes place between the possible and the impossible; or rather, it is the philosophy which discloses the impossible within the possible. The concepts central to deconstruction—for example, hospitality, justice, ethics, democracy, the gift—all function within the same quasi-transcendental logic: an economy of meaning and the transcendence or impossibility that underlies this economy.

Let us take the simplest example of the interplay between possibility and impossibility, the gift. At the most basic level giving a gift requires that A (the giver) give X (something) to C (the recipient) without the expectation of return. X must get all the way to C without remainder (A cannot keep something of the gift for herself). In order for it to be a gift and not something else (a bribe, a commercial exchange, theft, a loan, et cetera) A must wish to give and must not be coerced; she cannot confirm that X has been given; she cannot calculate the giving. All of these conditions must be met or the gift that is given is not a gift, but a calculated exchange of some kind. However, once C receives

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[4] Richard Kearney and Mark Dooley, *Questioning Ethics* (London: Routledge, 1999), 82.

the gift from A, she is now indebted to her: a debt of gratitude. And A feels a sense of generosity. C must repay the debt of gratitude, either by giving a gift of her own (surely A's birthday will come around eventually or another holiday will suit the purpose), or by expressing this gratitude with some kind of thanks. Thus, as soon as the gift is given it begins to annul itself as it is caught up in an economy of exchange. A pure gift is impossible as the moment it is given it falls into this exchange. Even if one were to give a gift unintentionally, the receiver of that gift is still in a position of debt. Consequently, we can say that what animates the giving of a gift is precisely its impossibility. The gift-giving takes on a quasi-transcendental logic: it is neither purely transcendental nor purely empirical, but somewhere in between the two. In other words, the practice of gift-giving must, out of necessity, push up against its impossibility and remains at the limit of the empirical. This is not to say we should not attempt to give gifts. On the contrary, it is this impossibility that urges us to give all the more. Because the gift is impossible we can never have given enough.

This logic underwrites more than gift-giving; so too is hospitality buoyed by its impossibility, democracy by its never being able to arrive, and ethics by the irreducible difference between treating someone as absolutely singular and simultaneously equal. And most importantly for this project, so too is communication itself built upon impossibility—a phenomenon marked by the concept of testimony. Before we turn to the concept of testimony proper, let us examine two sites of the impossibility of communication in Derrida's work, first in "Différance" and then "Signature Event Context."

Différance, Derrida claims, is neither a word nor a concept, thus making its explanation a difficult task. The introduction of the letter a to the French *différence*—an introduction only to be seen but not heard (highlighting the primacy of writing over speech)—produces a neologism, or neographism, which brings into relief its double meaning of differing and deferring. In one sense, *différer* is "the action of putting off until later, of taking into account, of taking into account of time and the forces of an operation that implies an economical calculation, a detour, a delay…" as well as "temporalization and spacing, the becoming-time of space and the becoming-space of time."[5] In another sense, more commonly held, *différer* refers to difference, to an element of otherness. *Différance* serves as a neographism which holds both of these meanings together and refers to both deferring and differing in one breath. Moreover, this double meaning housed in one space is then utilized to critique constituted ideas of presence and essentialism.

Through explicating the notion of the sign, Derrida demonstrates that the sign always only *represents* as it is never the thing to which it is referring; that is, "the sign represents the present in its absence […] the sign, in this sense, is deferred presence."[6] A problem arises here, as Derrida highlights how a notion of the sign presupposes that there was a first-order thing which once had presence and is now absent, that the sign attempts to re-present. In this way, *différance* points to a failure—the failure at the heart of signification. To be sure, it is the primacy of presence that Derrida aims to problematize because it is a primacy without justification. Furthermore, difference is simultaneously at

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[5] Jacques Derrida, "Différance," in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 8.
[6] Derrida, "Différance," 9.

work for the signs which are used to represent the deferred presence are themselves arbitrary. In other words, central to the theory of linguistics Derrida is drawing from (mainly Saussure), is the recognition that what words we use to refer to things are not essential givens. Rather, they are arbitrary determinations that then become socially agreed upon. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, any given word is intelligible only because it is a "network of oppositions" with other words. We search and find the words we are looking for through other words. For example, the term "cat" has no inherent meaning, instead we know what it means by virtue of other words such as "animal," "dog," or "lion" to which it itself does not correspond. So, the purity of what is present is lessened by being caught up in a chain of differences with what it is not (differing) and tempered by temporality (deferring). Thus there is no pure presence in itself as it is caught up in the play of *différance*. There is nothing 'behind' *différance*, no presence that could be unconcealed. Derrida writes, "Thus one comes to posit presence—and specifically consciousness, the being beside itself of consciousness—no longer as the absolutely central form of Being but as a 'determination' and as an 'effect.'"[7] There are no moments of arrival but only points of departure. *Différance* hints at the perpetual movement of departure within which we always find ourselves.

To ask "what is *différance*?" is to ask a question failed from the start by *différance* itself. Derrida writes,

> *Différance* is not. It is not a present being, however excellent, unique, principal, or transcendent. It governs nothing, reigns over nothing, and nowhere exercises any

[7] Derrida, "Différance," 16.

> authority. It is not announced by any capital letter. Not only is there no kingdom of *différance*, but *différance* instigates the subversion of every kingdom.[8]

Différance is an-archic; it actively subverts all attempts at the governance of being. He writes, *différance* "in a certain and very strange way, (is) 'older' than the ontological difference or than the truth of Being."[9] Nevertheless, *différance* functions transcendentally within the text as the unnamable, non-conceptual, as the conditions for the possibility of naming and conceptualization. *Différance* sets loose the play of possibilities that then give the world a sense of structure. We must be careful, however, as *différance* does not determine our relations within the world, but simply makes those relations possible—*différance* opens us up to the possibilities of the play of signification and meaning within which we make a life for ourselves. *Différance* makes impossible the pure presence that communication so desires.

In "Signature Event Context" Derrida approaches the impossibility of communication from a different perspective, that of boundaries or limits. There he takes issue with the classical theory of communication which presumes communication is the transference of meaning from one subject to another, in this case represented by the work of Condillac. The primary medium of this transmission is typically thought to be speech, whereas writing allows for this transmission but with the absence of the receiver/addressee. In this way, writing carries within it an extension of presence (the receiver who is potentially unknowable and who is not there). Indeed, it is the point of writing to share something with someone who is not there. Furthermore, in writing both

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[8] Derrida, "Différance," 21-22.
[9] Derrida, "Différance," 22.

the receiver and the writer are absent (though both are represented, presumed, in the words of the text). The written word thus breaks from its context as neither writer nor receiver need to be present. In order for writing to be possible multiple conditions need to be met: it must be legible and it must be iterable (repeatable) beyond the presence of both the receiver and the writer. Even though writing presupposes the bringing together of the writer and the addressee, it is built upon their having distance between them. Indeed, it must presuppose this distance so as to be the narration of an event (rather than the event itself). Most importantly, any written mark is unable to be enclosed within a particular context. It must continually remain open to the possibility of being cited or grafted elsewhere in another context. Of great importance to this project, no written mark is ever exhaustible as it is always open to emplacement within another context. Derrida extends this thinking on writing to communication as such through an analysis of speech act theory. Although we need not work through that argument here, it is important to note that this necessity of iterability and escaping the boundaries of context is still at work. Communication itself is impossible because it must, as a result of its repeatability, go beyond the direct sharing of an experience.

With these two accounts of the impossibility of communication in mind, let us hear Derrida's claim once more: "Testimony, which implies faith or promise, governs the entire social space." Testimony is a word with which we are familiar in an everyday sense. As a term it functions in religious, juridical, and historical discourse; testimony is the word, spoken or written, of a witness (*testis*: a witness, one who attests). Furthermore, testimony is also an act: *someone* testifies, offering words or actions which attest to *something* at the heart of experience. Testimony implies the relating of what has been

seen or heard to another. In other words, testimony implies both a teller and one who is told. As a result, testimony functions for the sake of judgment; it extends beyond the mere recording of facts and demands that the hearer makes a judgment (at bare minimum that she believes the teller to be telling the truth). One testifies so as to offer evidence or proof, perhaps of an event or experience. However, an attestation itself is never sufficient proof—it necessarily falls short of that which is being testified to. It is an account of an experience that has since passed.

In the context of a religious experience, the testimony is the residuum of one's spiritual encounter or commitment, an experience so transcendent it cannot be expressed in full. As Paul Ricoeur puts it in "The Hermeneutics of Testimony," the philosophical problem of testimony is that of "joining an *experience* of the absolute to the *idea* of the absolute."[10] There is an unavoidable disjuncture between the experience, which necessarily is historical and finite, and the idea which at least with regard to religion is beyond temporality. Furthermore, Ricoeur distinguishes between two forms of religious testimony: prophetic and kerygmatic. In the prophetic dimension of testimony meaning irrupts into history in a four-fold manner: (1) the testimony "comes from somewhere else" (the divinity who speaks through the prophet, for example); (2) testimony is not offered about some contestable fact but the "radical, global meaning of human experience"; (3) testimony is "oriented toward proclamation," that is, testimony is oriented toward the sharing of wisdom with as many others as can listen; and (4) testimony "implies a total

[10] Paul Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutics of Testimony," in *Essays on Biblical Interpretation*, trans. David Stewart and Charles E. Reagan (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 119. [Italics PR].

engagement of not just words, but acts."[11] For the prophet, the concept of testimony negotiates both the confession of faith and the commitment to the narrative of that which has been experienced. Kerygmatic testimony, on the other hand, centers around the confessional, for example, confessing to having been witness to the miracles of Christ. Here the figure of the martyr is most pressing. The words and acts of the witness testify to a commitment to one's faith. In both these dimensions, prophetic and kerygmatic, one must navigate the tension between a confession of faith and the narration of facts embedded in historical circumstances.

In juridical testimony, testifying is brought into relation with judgment. Eyewitness testimony remains insufficient proof alone and must be supported by additional facts of the case in order for a sound judgment to occur. Here the testifier is able to both testify that something did or did not occur, and the details of the occurrence, as well as to testify for something (either in favor of or against possible guilt). In this regard, testimony and the idea of the trial are intricately linked. One testifies so as to bring about a judgment.

Lastly, we have testimony within an historical context. Here testimony follows the same logic but with regard to the experience of historically significant events, in particular instances of trauma. Indeed, it is here where the bulk of contemporary research on testimony is being performed.[12] The figure of the witness is linked to trauma and the

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[11] Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutics of Testimony," 131.

[12] Early academic interest in testimony studies stems from discourses of vulnerability and trauma, particularly within Holocaust studies, African American studies, women's studies, and subaltern studies. Here testimony emerges both as a result of and in response to traumatic circumstances. For keen insight into contemporary testimony studies I highly

experience of the inconceivable, often the inconceivable occurrence of horrific violence. Testimonies of those who experienced the Shoah often stand as exemplary case studies. In this situation, historical testimony functions to confirm the existence of an experience of something that we would otherwise find unthinkable (the systematic and knowing desolation of an entire population, for example). Testimony rages against the potential of revisionist histories. It makes palpably clear the happening of a trauma so that it is recorded in memory for the sake of the future.

Testimony is, in all three ontic contexts, linked to a cause. In particular, it is linked to the cause of being believed for the sake of some future action. As a result, as Ricoeur illuminates, suspicion is always on the heels of testimony. In asking for belief there is always the possibility that the veracity of the testimony is lacking. In other words, testimony occurs only where things are uncertain. As Ricoeur writes in *Oneself as Another*, "Whereas doxic belief is implied in the grammar of 'I believe-that,' attestation belongs to the grammar of 'I believe-in."[13] And this believing-in is always susceptible to doubt. The one testifying tells us "I was there – believe me." As Ricoeur puts it, "The typical formulation of testimony proceeds from this pairing: I was there. What is attested to is indivisibly the reality of the past thing and the presence of the narrator at the place of its occurrence. And it is the witness who first declares himself a witness."[14] In other words, testimony is as much an attestation of oneself as it is the occurrence of things past.

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recommend the 2003 special issue in *Discourse* 25, no. 1 & 2. The essays there focus on the interplay between trauma, narrative, and literature.

[13] Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 21.

[14] Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 163-164.

Regardless of whether we examine the religious, juridical, or historical context, testimony implies a faith or promise. We readily admit of the element of faith in religious discourse, but Derrida's great insight is to acknowledge that this faith imbues all contexts, not merely the religious. Indeed, he goes so far as to say it governs the *entire* social space. There is as much faith in the New York Stock Exchange as there is the penitent in prayer, perhaps even more so. Our faith in our dialogue with one another is no less than the faith in the divine. At the barest minimum we have the faith that what the other tells us is true. When we testify, we promise the truth; we are under an oath, whether sacred or mundane. Derrida writes, "In testimony, truth is promised beyond all proof, all perception, all intuitive demonstration."[15] When we testify we make a promise, as the finite beings we are, that is rather difficult to keep. Nevertheless, as we shall see, it is this promise that makes possible any communicative situation. It is this faith, which testimony has at its core and brings into relief, that governs that space which we can properly call communicative. Testimony, Ricoeur tells us, "is hermeneutic in a double sense. In the first sense it gives to interpretation a content to be interpreted. In the second sense it calls for an interpretation."[16] In other words, testimony simultaneously indicates the aspect of manifestation present in the proclamation of one's words and deeds and it demands the working through of the meaning of the event.

This faith, this religiosity that is beholden to no historical religion, is intimately connected to language and the practice of hermeneutics. As I shall argue, language is

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[15] Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge: The Two Sources of 'Religion' at the Limits of Reason Alone," in *Religion*, eds. Jacques Derrida and Gianni Vattimo (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 63.
[16] Ricoeur, "The Hermeneutics of Testimony," 143.

revelatory—it reveals the world, and as such it reveals the conditions for the possibility of revelation in a strictly religious sense. Furthermore, it is language which bonds us together, not any discrete language of course, but that linguisticality which allows for the movement and shifts of particular languages across cultures and time. Language as the sharing forth of a world in common.

With this at hand, my project aims to move beyond testimony as the ontic practice with which we are readily familiar, to an understanding of testimony in its ontological manifestation. Said differently, I aim to argue that testimony, or testifying, marks the ontological condition of communication itself. In other words, testimony is not one product of communication among countless others, but communication is at root testimonial in nature. In thinking through the web of references that testimony provides we will be guided toward the conditions of possibility for communication. Furthermore, and in so doing, we will run up against the nature of the impossible. Indeed, testimony stands as the concept which finds the conditions for the possibility of communication in its impossibility.

Derrida's insight, paired with Ricoeur's explanations, provides an opening, a space to begin, but not the final word. What this project contributes is a series of sketches of the contours of communication as testimony. Although Derrida is quite clear about the reach of testimony, it remains to be seen what testimony looks like. In particular, this project highlights the hyperbolic dimensions of language, which I shall argue most clearly brings the dimensions of testimony into relief. In Chapter One we shall set the scene for our contemporary communicative circumstances by way of examining both what is at stake and what we are up against. It will demonstrate the socio-political

ramifications of misunderstanding communication through an articulation of the dual problems of fundamentalism and cynicism, each of which have a particular communicative comportment. Testimony, we shall see, is the understanding of communication necessary in the uncertainty we face following the dissolution of metaphysics. Following this, in Chapter Two we will examine the philosophical ground necessary for theorizing communication as testimony. This historical overview will take us through the philosophical movements of fundamental ontology and philosophical hermeneutics, more generally known as the linguistic turn in philosophy. We shall focus primarily on the contributions to theorizing communication from Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, and Hans-Georg Gadamer. These three thinkers provide the necessary theoretical ground, in a non-foundationalist world, for developing testimony as a philosophical concept. Chapter Three turns to the hyperbolic character of language that points to the testimonial nature of all communicative acts. The epistemological, ethical, and ontological dimensions of hyperbole will be explored with an eye toward their contributions to thinking about communication. Hyperbole functions as a figure that discloses our comportment as testifying. Finally, in Chapter Four we will turn our attention to three unlikely theorists of testimony and hyperbole: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Walt Whitman. A reading of these three (quasi)transcendentalists will offer sketches of the contours of testimony and more explicitly link testimony to democratic practice. The structure of testimony and that of democracy will take on a similar form with regard to the impossible. Said otherwise, each are called forward by the same ethical force.

As a work within the tradition of philosophy as a way of life, my dissertation does not propose a systematic program for understanding communication through an analysis of a singular figure or movement in philosophy. Throughout his work, but in particular in his books *Philosophy as a Way of Life* and *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, Pierre Hadot draws a distinction between discourse about philosophy and philosophy as a way of life. Philosophical discourse is something with which we are well familiar: the development of systems of logic, metaphysics, epistemology, and value theory—the standard areas of examination in philosophy departments worldwide. As such, philosophical discourse often serves to extend the history of philosophy in the practice of clarification, system-building, and occasionally, genuine revolutions in thought. For Hadot, and I find myself in agreement with him, this practice is necessary but not sufficient for a full understanding of philosophy. What often remains lacking in philosophical discourse is the call to live a good life. Philosophy as a way of life, on the other hand, is "a mode of existing-in-the-world, which [has] to be practiced at each instant, and the goal of which [is] to transform the whole of the individual's life."[17] Here, philosophy is not pure theorizing for the sake of clarifying conceptual systems, but an enterprise always already entwined with praxis. To draw from Socrates once more on the task of philosophy, "What is at stake is far from insignificant. It is how one should live one's life."[18] What could matter more? In this sense, the lessons of existentialism resound all the more clearly today. Now is always the time for doing philosophy.

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[17] Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, trans. Michael Chase (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1995), 265.
[18] Plato, "Republic," trans. Paul Shorey in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato, Including the Letters*. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairnes, Eds. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1980), 352d.

Although Hadot most often localizes philosophy as a way of life within the Hellenistic and Roman periods wherein various schools of thought and action developed in response to the Socratic dialogues, we would do well to remember that philosophy as a way of life did not end at its beginning. Rather, the promise of philosophy as a way of life as an existential practice of learning to live well reached its highest and most celebrated moment for those welcomed into philosophic communities (among them the Cynics, Stoics, Epicureans, and other post-Socratic movements), but it is not, as we will see, the conclusion of this approach to philosophy. In other words, philosophy as a way of life has continued, as an impulse throughout the discipline for as long as philosophy itself has been practiced. Importantly, in the development of schools in ancient Greece and early within the Roman empires, ways of life were promoted rather than discursive systems of conceptual apparatuses.

This is not to say these post-Socratic schools were without intricate and highly rigorous philosophical discourse. Far from it. Rather, the point is that philosophy also required substantial work on oneself in order to live in accordance with such principles. To simply understand the conceptual system but fail to live rightly was as much a failure of doing philosophy as misunderstanding the discourse altogether. In this way, philosophy is a form of preparation. We are well familiar with the assertion that philosophy means learning how to die, but equally philosophy is the preparation for a more just world to come. Consequently, as Hadot puts it in a series of interviews, philosophy consists in a "pole of discourse and a pole of action."[19] Discourse and life are

[19] Pierre Hadot, *The Present Alone is Our Happiness*, trans. Marc Djaballah (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 110.

inseparable. However, with the rise of Christianity and Scholasticism in the Middle Ages, philosophy understood as a way of life took a turn inward toward philosophical discourse and became the philosophy with which we are most familiar today—a disciplinary activity striving to extend an historical trajectory. From the medieval period forward, philosophy became a subject taught in universities and caught up in the training of specialists. Philosophy consequently becomes tied to the university structure and becomes a profession wherein one might become an expert. It is against this strain of philosophy that my dissertation finds its spirit.

Consequently, as a work of philosophy as a way of life, I intend to take a more liberatory approach, drawing insights and inspirations along the way from a multitude of thinkers. To this end, this dissertation is a kind of experiment and one that aims to provoke and incite. By experiment here I do not mean a process governed by a strict method (whether historical, scientific, or otherwise), but an attempt to see and think something anew from what the tradition has already given us. In this respect, this project is more akin to an aesthetic work than a science. This is most noticeable through the use of epigraphs in structuring the project. These epigraphs will be drawn from thinkers other than those whose conceptual work is central to this project as all can contribute a verse. Furthermore, I shall draw from realms complementary to philosophy: literature and poetry. I do so in the main to allow our insights to be iterated again and again in any form that will allow. Indeed, I might have written this dissertation as a poem, were I to have talent in the genre. But such is not my form; instead, these epigraphs shall serve as openings to our understanding. Although the work that follows these epigraphs will not

explain them in full, it is my hope that the epigraphs speak in a different register and contribute to a theory of testimony.

Let us then draw an insight from literature and get on our way. Recently, I had an encounter with Oscar Wilde, in particular his brilliant essay "On the Decay of Lying" wherein he speaks to the project we are attempting to undertake here. In this essay, as humorous as it is insightful, Wilde offers a dialogue between two friends: Cyril and Vivian. Cyril suggests they leave the stifled library and spend some time out of doors, to which Vivian responds with near horror as he finds nature to be a most uninteresting thing. It turns out he has recently written an article on the subject and offers to read it to Cyril instead, in the hopes they might remain indoors. The main thrust of his argument is that art is superior in all ways to nature (what is the sunset, she ponders, other than a second-rate Turner painting?) because art breaks free "from the prison-house of realism."[20] Art stretches beyond the confines of everyday life and shows us something extra-ordinary. Indeed, for Vivian, we begin life with "a natural gift for exaggeration which, if nurtured in congenial and sympathetic surroundings, or by the imitation of the best models, might grow into something really great and wonderful."[21] Unfortunately, however, we often fall "into careless habits of accuracy or [take] to frequenting the society of the aged and the well informed," both of which are disastrous for the imagination. It is the exaggeration that art produces that gives life its vitality and beauty. In a wonderful twist of the essay, we learn that art is meant not to represent the world, but to demand the world conform to it. In this sense, art has the power to alter nature. The

[20] Oscar Wilde, "The Decay of Lying" in *Intentions* (New York: Brentano, 1905), 9.
[21] Wilde, "The Decay of Lying," 3.

artist, or the liar as they are of the same kind, both gives pleasure and surpasses nature. For Vivian, this is reason enough to revive the art of lying. "Nature is no great mother who has borne us. She is our creation. It is in our brain that she quickens to life," Vivian states, "Things are because we see them, and what we see, and how we see it, depends on the Arts that have influenced us. To look at a thing is very different from seeing a thing."[22] The lie that art gives is a greater truth than the truth of nature itself.

It is with the spirit of the artist then that I undertake this task. I will try to offer a way of seeing communication anew, by focusing on some features over others. This is key as at times my discussions, in particular of hyperbole, will seem themselves an exaggeration. This is correct as I am aiming to point at the truth of the matter, something which underlies the phenomenon, rather than making a claim about fact. Not every speech act *is* hyperbole, and yet, it has something hyperbolic about it. And this "something hyperbolic" is what brings us to understanding communication as testimony.

[22] Wilde, "The Decay of Lying," 12.

CHAPTER 2. A CRISIS OF DIRECTIONALITY

> *Now if, today, the 'question of religion' actually appears in a new and different light, if there is an unprecedented resurgence, both global and planetary, of this ageless thing, then what is at stake is language, certainly…*
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> *Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge"*

2.1 In the Wake of Disaster

> If man is ever to solve that problem of politics in practice he will have to approach it through the problem of the aesthetic, because it is only through beauty that man makes his way to freedom.
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> Friedrich Schiller, *Letters on the Aesthetic Education of Man*

The single most important moment for contemporary philosophy is Friedrich Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God. Few moments in the history of philosophy are parallel to the force of Nietzsche's words. Indeed, as will become clear, it is my conviction that all responsible philosophy attempting to speak of the human event has had to come to terms with Nietzsche's declaration and it is from out of this understanding that philosophy must continue to fulfill its promise as the love of wisdom and the practice of learning how to live.

To be sure, we find talk of the death of God and its consequences throughout Nietzsche's work, though it is most explicit in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and *The Gay*

Science—the former a work of philosophical fiction, the latter a book of aphorisms and poetry. The most well-known and consequently misrepresented iteration is published as aphorism 125 of *The Gay Science*, titled "The Madman."[1] Although I am aware of the

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[1] I offer the entire aphorism in full so that we have recourse to its genius for the interpretive work to follow:

The madman.—Have you not heard of that madman who lit a lantern in the bright morning hours, ran to the market place, and cried incessantly: "I seek God! I seek God!"—As many of those who did not believe in God were standing around just then, he provoked much laughter. Has he got lost? asked one. Did he lose his way like a child? asked another. Or is he hiding? Is he afraid of us? Has he gone on a voyage? Emigrated?—Thus they yelled and laughed.

The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. "Whither is God? He cried; "I will tell you. *We have killed him*—you and I. All of us are his murderers.

"But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us this sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as though through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is it not night continually closing in on us? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning? Do we hear nothing as yet of the noise of gravediggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing as yet of the divine decomposition? Gods, too, decompose. God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.

"How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers? What was holiest and mightiest of all that the world has yet owned has bled to death under our knives: who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us? Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it? There has never been a greater deed; and whoever is born after us—for the sake of this deed he will belong to a higher history than all history hitherto."

Here the madman fell silent and looked again at his listeners; and they, too, were silent and stared at him in astonishment. At last he threw his lantern on the ground, and it broke into pieces and went out. "I have come too early," he said then; "my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering; it has not yet reached the ears of men. Lightening and thunder require time; the light of the stars requires time; deeds, though done, require time to be seen and heard. This deed is still more distant from them than the most distant stars—*and yet they have done it themselves*."

It has been related further that on the same day the madman forced his way into several churches and there struck up his *requiem aeternam deo*. Led out and called to account, he is said always to replied nothing but: "What after all are these churches now

boldness of such a claim, that one might declare a most important moment for contemporary philosophy, I am nonetheless convinced very little in the history of philosophy—short of Platonic metaphysics and Cartesian epistemology—has had such a profound consequence not only for the discipline itself, but also for modern life generally. With this clarion call against all fixed foundations, a new modernity was ushered forward. Before turning to the content of Nietzsche's insight, let us examine its form as it bears within it a kind of reading protocol or recommendation for its interpretation for those who are concerned with both philosophy and communication.

Nietzsche offers this philosophical proclamation to us as an aphorism. Aphorisms are a distinct literary form and one that offers a particular style otherwise than the standard propositional argument so popular within the history of philosophy. In other words, aphorisms speak differently from other rhetorical forms. In his essay "The Aphorism: Fragments from the Breakdown of Reason" Gary Saul Morson draws a distinction between riddles, dictums, and aphorisms so as to clarify the potential of aphorisms for extensive philosophical thought.[2] First, the riddle although productive of multiple interpretations, always has an answer and this condition of an answer recursively shapes the form of a riddle. Take for example the Sphinx's famous riddle to Oedipus: what is the thing whose voice is one, and whose feet are four and two and three? The answer of course is human beings as they live out their finitude (we first crawl, then walk upright, and finally utilize a cane in old age). Along the way to solving the riddle we are

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if they are not the tombs and sepulchers of God?" Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), aphorism 125. Italics FN.

[2] Gary Saul Morson, "The Aphorism: Fragments from the Breakdown of Reason," *New Literary History 34*(3): 409-429.

opened to a multitude of insights and readings—for example, a lesson about the metamorphoses of human being and finitude— but at the end of the day the riddle has a single answer. As Morson puts it "If life were a riddle, everything could be solved."[3] Thankfully things are not so simple. Although Nietzsche's writing is playful, indeed he returns play and a sense of style to the philosophical tradition, he does not present his readers with riddles; he has no concern with solutions or at least not permanent ones. The dictum, lacking in all mystery, resembles the answer to a riddle. The dictum reduces complexity to a simple statement. Among Morson's numerous examples is Karl Marx and Friedrich Engel's claim in the *Communist Manifesto* that "the history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles."[4] What we do with the dictum is no doubt complex and layered with conflicts of interpretation, but the dictum itself is transparent. There is little confusion over what the author intended or how the statement is to be understood even beyond authorial intention. Moreover, for Morson, dicta have totalizing tendencies that prohibit exceptions. They aim, in covering everything, to be both clear and certain, avoiding all doubt and complexity when possible.

Contrary to both the riddle and the dictum the aphorism values above all the preservation of mystery. The force of mystery initiates the open style of the aphorism to which the words point again and again. Morson writes, "Despite their variety in tone, form, and language, aphorisms all share a sense that what is most valuable to grasp lies beyond our reach."[5] In other words, the aphorism always points beyond itself, beyond the world of the text, and into the to and fro of our own existence. The truth of an aphorism is

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[3] Morson, "The Aphorism," 415.
[4] Morson, "The Aphorism," 415.
[5] Morson, "The Aphorism," 421.

obscure and expansive; it raises entanglements rather than clarifies, perplexes rather than soothes. For Morson, the opening lines of the *Tao Te Ching* come to mind when searching for examples. It reads: "The Way that can be spoken of/is not the constant way./ The name that can be named/ is not the constant name./ Mystery upon mystery/ The gateway of manifold secrets."[6] This aphorism opens us out upon a world imbued with mystery, into a world about which it is difficult to speak.

Nietzsche's aphorisms, I believe, function in a similar manner. Moreover, and moving beyond Morson, it is this mystery that makes the pronouncing of any dicta possible. Mystery comes first, incites us, and moves us to speak. In *On the Genealogy of Morals* Nietzsche writes of his own aphoristic style:

> People find difficulty with the aphoristic form: this arises from the fact that today this form is not taken seriously enough. An aphorism, properly stamped and molded, has not been 'deciphered' when it has simply been read; rather, one has then to begin its *exegesis*, for which is required an art of exegesis.[7]

Unlike the propositional argument, the aphorism asks the reader to work (rather than merely comprehend) and provide an interpretation of the text before her. In other words, the aphorism requires from the start a hermeneutic posture toward understanding the text against the backdrop of a multiplicity of interpretations. That is to say, the aphorism as a form demands that we learn how to read. Learning to read in this sense has little to do with deciphering marks on a page, but is more broadly concerned with making meaning

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[6] Morson, "The Aphorism," 420.
[7] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. Walter Kaufmann and RJ Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1967), 22-23. Emphasis Nietzsche's.

within and beyond the text. Importantly, the art of exegesis here does not refer to finding some meaning lying latent in the text (and, as we shall see, Nietzsche had some doing in this insight). Nietzsche's hermeneutics are not that of early biblical and legal textual interpretation. On the contrary, exegesis is not a process of discovery but of production. Reading and ruminating on an aphorism means producing (and reproducing anew each time) its meaning in relation to other possible meanings and contexts. Working through an aphorism requires reflection on historical context, not only the chronological context within which the aphorism was written but even more so the larger historical conversation into and against which the aphorism is speaking. Nor can we ignore the individual hermeneutic context between the reader as someone who has lived a life (that is, has a history of her own) in relationship to the text. Among the greatest lessons of hermeneutics is that a text discloses itself in response to the questions asked of it. In short, in reading one must come to terms with the ever-shifting rhetorical landscape and the hermeneutic layers spanning from the individual to the epochal, all of which is embedded in a shared history.

Moreover, aphorisms open up new lines of interpretation and thought; they tend to unfold outwards rather than spiral inward toward a singular interpretation. In her essay "Nietzsche and the Art of Aphorism" Jill Marsden notes that, "Nietzsche's aphorisms are escape routes from convictions, byways into the labyrinth of the unforeseen. Deriving from the Greek term *aphorismos*, meaning 'definition' (from *aphorizein* to define, from *horos*, boundary), the aphorism emerges in Nietzsche's writings as a new 'horizon' for

philosophy, that which sets the limit rather than that which is defined *by* a limit."[8] That is to say, Nietzsche's aphorisms in particular break away from unquestioned assumptions and everyday modes of understanding and try to make a space for understanding the world otherwise. By taking up a little used form, Nietzsche breathes life once more into the philosophical project and offers a new way of doing philosophy, what I argue is a form of philosophy as a way of life. In giving philosophy a new horizon, Nietzsche gives philosophy an alternative way of orienting and envisioning itself.

Unlike the proposition, the aphorism is irreducible to a single meaning and instead opens outward into larger webs of significance. Marsden notes that "for the active reader the aphorism, like the arrow, is thought in flight. If we are moved by the aphorism we return to it again and again as something that has the power to move."[9] Consequently, aphorisms are not merely to be read, but to be digested and put to work; they move the reader, incite her. It is of little surprise then that Nietzsche turns to the cow as the exemplar of hermeneutic consciousness—one must ruminate on a text, chew it again and again, in an effort to extract its wisdom (wisdom which is, we must note, potentially different in each ruminating iteration). In this sense, when dealing with an aphorism we go beyond textual comprehension and seek understanding, i.e., putting the text into conversation with other texts and contexts. An aphorism has the power to move us, to orient our understanding and guide us to action. The force of the thought is paramount. This is, perhaps, what makes reading Nietzsche and other aphorists so exciting—something, be it ourselves or our understanding, which amount to one and the same, is

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[8] Jill Marsden, "Nietzsche and the Art of the Aphorism," in *A Companion to Nietzsche*, ed. Keith Ansell Parson (Hoboken, NJ: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 22.
[9] Marsden, "Nietzsche and the Art of the Aphorism," 31.

moved. Our understanding is transported from one horizon to another and we might then find ourselves at the vista of new meanings. As Gilles Deleuze, reader of Nietzsche par excellence, writes in "Nomadic Thought,"

> An aphorism is a play of forces, a state of forces which are always exterior to one another. An aphorism doesn't mean anything, it signifies nothing, and no more has a signifier than a signified. Those would be ways of restoring a text's interiority. An aphorism is a state of forces, the last of which, meaning at once the most recent, the most actual, and the provisional-ultimate, is *the most external.* Nietzsche posits it quite clearly: if you want to know what I mean, find the force that gives what I say meaning, and a new meaning if need be. Hook the text up to this force.[10]

Central to Deleuze's description is the productive power of an aphorism. Sufficient rumination requires moving beyond the words in the text to the impetus that exhorted the meaning in the first place. This impetus is not the author's intention, but we might understand it as their inspiration. In other words, the impetus is the set of circumstances and forces that moved or spurs Nietzsche to write, or the insight that demanded some form of worldly expression. Marsden complements this insight stating,

> In the aphorism something is felt which is as yet unexpressed. It is this charge which ignites other thoughts, prompting other associations, which ultimately may stray far beyond the "sense" of the initial aphorism. No longer privileging familiar

[10] Gilles Deleuze, "Nomadic Thought," in *Desert Islands and Other Texts* (Los Angeles: Semiotext(e), 2004), 256. Italics GD.

> habits of recognition, we come to trust our peripheral vision, the judgments of our remote receptors, our new sensory horizons.[11]

Thinking through Nietzsche gives us a new vocabulary for philosophy; not issues of propositions and arguments, but excitations, forces, expressions, impetuses, and the movement of thinking. What thoughts, then, does "The Madman" ignite, especially for those who wish to think otherwise about philosophy and communication?

Let us follow one line of thought, among many others, here. The aphorism begins with a question that implicates the reader: "Have you not heard?" From the very start, time feels out of joint—how long ago did the story's events unfold? Should we have heard by now? Have we somehow been left out of the loop so to speak or are we at fault for not already having known of these events? The opening line requires we come to terms with it and situate ourselves in response as the aphorism unfolds. Regardless of how we take up this task, we are confronted with a madman carrying a lantern at daylight (for daylight is no promise that everything is illuminated) exhorting a group of non-believers. That the madman is speaking to non-believers is crucial and all too often overlooked. He decries with nearly cruel mocking not the believer, but those who have already lost or given up their belief. This is imperative: the madman is not concerned with the faithful, but with those who think themselves beyond faith. He is taking to task those who believe themselves certain. While he seeks God, the others jeer at him and mercilessly poke fun. The madman's seekings, however, are somewhat disingenuous—a set-up for a performance not to be matched. He seeks for something he knows is not there and never will be, if it ever was. His seeking fails in advance of its performance. God is

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[11] Marsden, "Nietzsche and the Art of the Aphorism," 36.

not missing, not on the run or hiatus, not somewhere else with the hopes of return; he is dead and the witnesses to this event are incriminated in the murder. "*We have killed him."*

But who is this God we have killed? The most common misreading of this passage, particularly within pop culture interpretations but sometimes still found lurking in philosophy departments, is that the god who has been killed is merely the God of monotheism. This is true, but not sufficiently so. What makes Nietzsche so interesting is his ability to show that this god goes by many names. Not merely God the Father or Yahweh or Allah, not merely the God that metes out justice or salvation, but likewise those metaphysical gods of Platonism and positivistic science to which we are far more addicted. Indeed, perhaps these gods more than anything else. Were the God who dies only the God of monotheism, we might actually be able to handle such a death. Rather, with this death all solid foundations crumble; it is the death of foundation as such. With this death of God we witness the dissolution of metaphysics. Indeed, it is this dissolution that gives force to Nietzsche's thought and it is the force to which we must connect this text.

By metaphysics I mean something rather general. The term, as the story goes, comes from a quandary over what to do with Aristotle's writings that followed those on nature and the characteristics of movement (i.e., physics). Thus they received the label of *meta*- (after or post) physics. Continuing with Aristotle, metaphysics was the study of things that did not change, first causes, or being as such. Consequently, metaphysics had a wide scope in the history of philosophy as it tried to ground philosophy itself. With the Christianizing impulse in medieval philosophy, metaphysics concerned that which was not-nature or not in flux, namely the divine. Metaphysics investigated that which was

beyond the natural world and was the source for the natural world's existence. As a result, it was concerned with organizing entities within the categories of being by way of understanding the nature of substance, that which undergirded all empirical phenomenon. By the time we reach Kant, whose metaphysics Nietzsche will scrupulously critique, metaphysics has become the science of the supra-sensible.

This relationship between monotheism, Platonism, and positivistic science share a metaphysics of objectivity wherein truth is an objective fact, whether grounded in divine or secular transcendence. Nietzsche has little, if any, patience for truth of such a kind. Indeed, in *Twilight of the Idols* he offers a direct link between these historical trajectories in "How the 'Real World' Finally Became a Fable, Or the History of an Error." Here Nietzsche traces the lineage of the idea of truth. First there is "the real world — attainable for the wise man, the pious, the virtuous man; he lives in it, he is it" which corresponds to Plato (and Platonism's) conception of the forms. This morphs into "the real world — unattainable for now, but promised for the wise man, the pious, the virtuous man," or the promise of Christianity. Then we find "the real world — unattainable, unprovable, unpromisable; but the mere thought of it — a consolation, an obligation, an imperative," or the Kantian thing in itself. Following this "the real world — unattainable? At any rate unattained, and since unattained also unknown," what Nietzsche attributes to the earliest forms of positivism. At this point, Nietzsche speaks to the historical and philosophical moment he is trying to inaugurate: "The 'real world — an idea with no further use, no longer even an obligation — an idea become useless, superfluous, therefore a refuted idea: let us do away it!" Upon which follows "The real world — we have done away with it: what world is left? The apparent one perhaps? But no! With the real world we have also

done away with the apparent one."[12] The aphorism of the death of God and the fable of the true world ought to be read together as they each speak to the dissolution of objectivity. When Nietzsche speaks of the death of God, we understand him to be speaking of the death of objective truth itself, the death of foundation as such, which is what makes this death so unbearable.

Even more unsettling as a consequence of the dissolution of metaphysics we find simultaneously the dissolution of any ethical theory built on a now defunct foundationalism. Lacking the ground for objectivity—whether in an afterlife, realm of ideas, or a necessary condition of reason—ethics seemingly loses its force. Without fixed and stable rules we are left then wondering what, if anything, is prohibited and what, if anything, is required of us. This is of course the threat of nihilism and its aberrations of unbridled relativism and fatalism. It might well be the case that all is permitted and nothing prohibited, if it is the case that only a fixed foundation allows us to ground our understanding and practice. With nihilism we have recourse to no stable ground, no recourse to the horizon to which we orient ourselves and from which we undertake our practical actions has vanished—we have wiped it away. The Madman laments,

> But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us this sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying as though

[12] Friedrich Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, trans. Duncan Large (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 20.

> through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is it not night continually closing in on us?

Without a horizon we are unable to position ourselves against a fixed point wherein we would always have the ability to orient ourselves in any given circumstance. Everything becomes, in the flash of a moment, uncertain. Without a foundation we have no guarantee of what we must do. On the contrary, we must work within a multitude of possible options, each as present as the next and none able to promise itself as the best option. Without a stable ground, everything is a risk. As we shall see in the chapters that follow, it is philosophical hermeneutics which allows us to make sense of and dwell within this risk.

Let us pause for a moment and note that Nietzsche speaks of what has already occurred ("*How shall we comfort ourselves, the murderers of all murderers*?"); metaphysics has, in its trajectory, dissolved itself. Nietzsche has not dissolved metaphysics, rather he has described the situation as he sees it in dissolution. He offers an interpretation of the current circumstances but by no means shatters metaphysics on his own. Indeed, it is this fact that allows us to understand claims by Heidegger and his inheritors that Nietzsche is the last metaphysician of the West.[13] Nietzsche sees, with unmatched clarity, the crumbling of the "true world" but is not yet beyond it. He simply rings the bell and proclaims the death he sees in the philosophical landscape surrounding him. He feels its force and attempts to give voice to it for those who might be ready to

[13] In particular, see Martin Heidegger's lectures on Nietzsche in *Nietzsche*, vols. 1-4, trans. David F. Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1991-1992).

hear. Said differently, he voices the transformation of Platonism and monotheism to its inevitable movement into nihilism.

I claimed this aphorism was the single most important moment in contemporary philosophy precisely because this aphorism leaves no philosophy unscathed. Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God illuminates what I shall call throughout this project a crisis of directionality. Unable to tell up from down, forward from backward, we are left spinning uncontrollably through webs of meaning without fixed reference or rest. If we take Nietzsche to be correct in the opening sections of *On the Genealogy of Morals*, that human beings are always in search of meaning and that the one thing we cannot bear is meaninglessness—in particular, suffering without reason of some sort—then it is imperative we understand our attempts to give meaning to this situation which brings all meanings into question. In order to bear this crisis of directionality, this complete and utter disorientation, we must invent new "fixed" points that acknowledge their hermeneutic malleability or cling helplessly to the original foundations which we no longer have. Moreover, this aphorism, and the idea of directionality that it infers, will ground the theoretical work to follow not only as its inspiration but as an image that gives sense to a philosophical concept.

The crisis of directionality the death of God leaves us in is a veritable disaster ("*who will wipe this blood off us? What water is there for us to clean ourselves? What festivals of atonement, what sacred games shall we have to invent? Is not the greatness of this deed too great for us*?"). It is worth recalling that the etymology of disaster is to be away from or unable to see the stars; that is, in a disaster we are without recourse to any orienting principle. We are adrift, searching for anything that might provide us a way.

Furthermore, it is an event for which we have yet to become worthy (*Must we ourselves not become gods simply to appear worthy of it?*). After Nietzsche's proclamation of the death of God philosophy must face the pressing question of its new purpose and task; it must seek new constellations to illuminate and give direction to its path. Becoming worthy of this deed requires a reexamination and shattering of our so-called certain foundations and the development of now orienting principles that are sensitive to the foundationless ground upon which they rest. Said otherwise, to become worthy we need to turn to the insights of hermeneutics. The death of God leads, necessarily, to a perspectival and interpretive approach to philosophy; it requires philosophy to embrace its hermeneutic dimensions.

This is a disaster to which we have no recourse. We cannot turn our backs, as if we had never heard, nor can we return to some pre-modern that never was. More so, the problem with this disaster, as I shall show in the sections that follow, is that our responses to it have in the main been restricted and insufficiently reflective. The orienting principles toward which we have turned have led us even more astray, if such a thing were possible.

2.2 From Fundamental Ontology to the Ontology of Actuality

> But the point is, first, you have to ask the question, "What is it that is going on?" and then find out how to respond in the fitting way.
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> Calvin O. Schrag, "From the Loving Struggle to the Struggle to Love"

Whatever task philosophy could take up after Nietzsche, one thing was certain: things needed to be re-thought and nothing so much so as the concept of being, that

founding idea with which philosophy has struggled for so long.[14] No one took up this call with more gusto and precision than Martin Heidegger. Not simply in *Being and Time*, but throughout all his writings and the various stages of thought, the concept of being received radical reformulation. Raising anew the question of the meaning of being, as being is something about which we have become "perplexed," Heidegger unhinges being from its relationship to predication and substance. Being is not something that belongs to an entity like an attribute of some kind, nor is it the content of the entity itself. *Being and Time* discloses many philosophical possibilities, but foremost among them it is an unflagging critique of substance ontologies. Since Platonism, for Heidegger, being has been conflated with beings; that is, the fact of existence itself, the to-be, is understood as a kind of supreme entity under which all other entities are subsumed. Being has been made ontic, rather than properly ontological. In order to remedy this unparalleled mistake in the history of philosophy, a mistake that Nietzsche clears the way to see, Heidegger proposes fundamental ontology as the route through which we can ask, with clear-eyed earnestness, of the question of the meaning of being.[15]

In addition to mistaking being for a discrete being of some sort, substance ontology also overlooks the being for whom this distinction is an issue. The question of the meaning of being must be formulated, and consequently, only human beings—i.e.,

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[14] I have decided in this project to no longer retain the capitalization of being as Being unless using a direct quote. I fear this grammatical distinction risks reifying being into a supreme Being or at the very least a being among other beings—precisely that which fundamental ontology and phenomenological hermeneutics has overcome in the history of metaphysics. When discussing ontic beings the term will either be used in the plural or it will be noted we are dealing with an ontic entity.

[15] Heidegger's concept of being will be further, and more intensely, explored in the next chapter where the relationship between being and communication is raised. Consequently, my discussion of being here is cursory and incomplete.

Dasein—can take up this charge. In this regard, for Heidegger Dasein is in the privileged position as being the only one who can raise the question of the meaning of being. There is a coincidence of question and questioner. As a result, Dasein is ontically distinctive in that it is ontological. That said, this privilege is simultaneously a problem as Dasein is paradoxically in the position of being ontically closest to itself, while ontologically the farthest away.

Phenomenology, for Heidegger, and more specifically fundamental ontology, is the route through which the question of the meaning of being can be raised. Here Heidegger departs from the transcendental phenomenology of Husserl and develops instead a hermeneutic of Dasein as the style or way (but not quite a method) to approach being. Indeed, the whole of *Being and Time* discloses the ground upon which phenomenological talk of subjects and objects is made possible and in that respect undermines the subject/object distinction as the foundation of experience. We shall return to this in the following chapter; for now, however, we must simply note that being still remains an issue of utmost philosophical importance.

Taking up both Nietzsche and Heidegger, contemporary Italian philosopher Gianni Vattimo has suggested the task of philosophy, after overcoming substance ontology through phenomenology and philosophical hermeneutics, ought now be an "ontology of actuality." He borrows this phrase from Michel Foucault who in his 1983 lecture (that would later be edited in English into his essay "What is Enlightenment?") writes that one must choose between "a critical philosophy which presents itself as an analytical philosophy of thought in general and a critical thought which will take the form

of an ontology of ourselves, an ontology of actuality."[16] Although of a similar spirit, Vattimo intentionally moves the project in a different direction. He takes up the phrase as a response to Heidegger's call to recollect being, or as Heidegger puts it in his *Introduction to Metaphysics* to address the question: "How does it stand with Being," or more colloquially, "How's it going with Being?"[17] In other words, an ontology of actuality describes being as it is understood within a particular epoch. Vattimo writes in *Nihilism and Emancipation*: "An ontology of actuality abandons all foundational claims and offers politics a certain vision of the ongoing historical process and a certain interpretation (free and not without risk) of its positive potential, judged to be such on the basis not of eternal principles but of argumentative choices from within the process itself."[18] The practice of philosophy is historical through and through—there is no separation between philosophy and temporality, most pressingly when it comes to the question of being. Furthermore, philosophy is now required to take note of rhetoric and rhetorical theory. An ontology of actuality rests on rhetorical choices and argumentation.

In this respect, and in clear distinction from Heidegger, doing philosophy becomes an avowed political task from the start. That is, one does not merely do political philosophy, as if it were a choice between different philosophical domains (metaphysics,

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[16] This lecture would later be edited into his provocative essay, building on Kant, "What is Enlightenment?" However, in the editing process Foucault removed this sentence and discussed instead "an historical ontology of ourselves" rather than "an ontology of actuality." Nevertheless, Vattimo continues to use the phrase. Cf. Michel Foucault, "Qu'est-ce que les Lumières?," *Dits et ècrits II, 1976-1988* (Paris: Gallimard, 2001), 1506-1507.

[17] Martin Heidegger, *Introduction to Metaphysics*, trans. Gregory Fried and Richard Polt (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 41.

[18] Vattimo, *Nihilism and Emancipation: Ethics, Politics, and Law*, trans. William McCuaig (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 88.

axiology, ethics, et cetera). One, in doing philosophy, is always already doing political work. In particular, this work is generative and reconstructive in the face of the breakdown of metaphysics and the modernization of the human experience. An ontology of actuality responds to the call of being in *our age*. Vattimo writes,

> Ontology of actuality" assumes the status of a mission, that of revealing, within the aperture of Being typical of modernity, the traits of a new aperture which would have among its constitutive characteristics the possibility of a reconstruction of the unitary sense of existence beyond the specialization and fragmentation proper to modernity.[19]

An aperture is an opening, as in the aperture of a camera wherein light can enter the instrument. An aperture of being, then, is the opening through which Being can be revealed for our time. In tracing the contours of being, the ontology of actuality takes on a double significance, that of "making oneself aware of the paradigm into which one has been thrown yet suspending its claim to definitive validity and heeding Being as that which remains unsaid."[20] Our aperture of being must go beyond the specialization and fragmentation of modernity, as Vattimo notes, but to understand this requirement we must first turn our attention to that which constricts our access to being; that is, we must examine what contracts or deflects our vision. This restriction is communicative and it is also communication that presents a way out.

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[19] Vattimo, *Nihilism and Emancipation*, 12.
[20] Gianni Vattimo, *A Farewell to Truth*, trans. William McCuaig (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 32.

2.3 Narrowed Horizons

> "To hell with it all" and "let's pray that it lasts" are the two sighs heaved alternately by the same civilized distress.
>
> The Invisible Committee, *To Our Friends*

In what follows I shall explicate what I see to be the two predominant forces in our age that restrict an accomplished response to the call of being after the death of God: fundamentalism and cynicism. Each embodies a set of communicative practices that narrow the apertures of being and each is that from which we must find our way. Neither of these phenomena, in their myriad forms, is particularly new; rather, each has been with us for quite some time having consequence not only for the practice of philosophy but for the experience of everyday life. In other words, both fundamentalism and cynicism are deeply rooted in our being in the world and not something easily overcome. Nevertheless, as historical and communicative phenomenon they are open to change. Although these approaches to the call of being are distinct as they have a series of exclusive traits, they also have a great deal in common as my investigation will demonstrate.

2.3.1 Fundamentalism

Although the events of September 11, 2001 brought fundamentalism to the forefront of the American public's mind, fundamentalism is by no means reducible to the global politics of the early twenty-first century. Fundamentalism runs much deeper, to the core of our desires and our insecurities; fundamentalism is a response to freedom. It is an ideological position into which we fall easily and out of which is a difficult journey. As contemporary psychoanalyst Adam Phillips quips, "We are all fundamentalists about

something."[21] There is always something about which we are unwilling to see otherwise, something we hold so dear we are unwilling to allow it to change. The varieties of fundamentalism we are faced with today include, at the very least, religious, scientific, and economic fundamentalism. I shall address each in turn before addressing fundamentalism as a whole.

Religious fundamentalism is likely the fundamentalism with which we are most familiar not least because it is the one that receives the greatest media attention. Religious fundamentalism is a response to the modernization and secularization of the West. Historically, with the rise of global travel and networked communications, the world becomes demystified and religion plays a smaller role in the shaping of identity with the increased exposure to alternate ways of life. This demystification or relativizing of the world, however, received a backlash. Fundamentalist movements can be found on nearly every continent and within multiple religions, among them: Evangelical Christianity, militant Zionism, sects of Shia Islam, and circles of Hindu and Buddhist practice. Although definitions of religious fundamentalism abound, sociologist Gabriel Almond and his colleagues offer a particularly strong rendering that suits our hermeneutic interests. Fundamentalism is "a discernable pattern of religious militance by which self-styled 'true believers' attempt to arrest the erosion of religious identity, fortify the borders of the religious community, and create viable alternatives to secular institutions

[21] Adam Phillips, "On What is Fundamental," in *On Balance* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2010), 65.

and behaviors."[22] Fundamentalism, then, is an inoculation against the flux of time. Furthermore, according their well-known study of seven world religious traditions in "Fundamentalisms: Genus and Species," fundamentalist groups are shaped by nine characteristics:

(1) Reactivity to the marginalization of religion: the religious tradition is perceived as under attack by the modernization and secularization;
(2) Selectivity: fundamentalism selects and reshapes aspects of the religion that helps to mark it in contradistinction from modernity;
(3) Dualistic worldview: fundamentalism takes on a kind of Manichaeism wherein the world is separated into good/evil, light/dark;
(4) Absolutism and inerrancy: the sacred text is unquestionable and free of error;
(5) Millennialism and messianism: there is a belief in the end of time or the return of the holy one;
(6) Elect, chosen membership: members of fundamentalist movements see themselves as called to take up this task to separate themselves from the secular world in defense of this tradition;
(7) Sharp boundaries: clear rules to determine in- and out-groups;
(8) Authoritarian organization: organized around charismatic leaders and numerous followers
(9) Behavior requirements: rules about appropriate action and belief.[23]

Although religious fundamentalism is practically as old as religion itself as it is an orientation toward orthodox tradition, scholars have speculated that the current forms of religious fundamentalism may have gained traction in the early 1990s as a replacement for Marxist-Leninism, National Socialism, and anti-colonialism, the former ideological

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[22] Gabriel Almond, R. Scott Appleby, and Emmanuel Sivan, *Strong Religion: The Rise of Fundamentalisms Around the World* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 17.

[23] Gabriel Almond, Emmanuel Sivan, and R. Scott Appleby, "Fundamentalisms: Genus and Species," in *Fundamentalisms Comprehended*, eds. Martin Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 399-424. This edited work is volume one of a five-part project that traces the roots of fundamentalism across continents and religions and puts contemporary fundamentalist organizations into context.

responses to the rise of the liberal-capitalist world order of the West.[24] In other words, religious fundamentalism is a response to the modern capitalist ethos and the fragmentation of orthodoxy. Consequently, religious fundamentalism often yearns to return to a mythical golden age when the norms of the fundamental tradition were most prevalent, but by no means perfect. Whether the era of the prophet Muhammad and the immediate successors for Islam or the bygone days of the 1950s for American Evangelicals, fundamentalism shares a curious relationship to nostalgia. Nostalgia, from the Greek, is a painful yearning to return home. Recalling Nietzsche, this nostalgia is a desire—however misplaced—to have one's feet on solid ground, to have a fixed space from which to act rather than the muddled chaos of life in modernity. The religious fundamentalist denies the crisis of antifoundationalism and acts as if the madman's words had never been proclaimed. In other words, the fundamentalist is one who has not heard.

Let us remember, however, that it was not the believers with whom the madman was speaking but the non-believers, those who we might call the inheritors of Enlightenment reason and objectivity. In this regard, a claim of scientific fundamentalism seems to be oxymoronic. Science and faith have been pitted against each other for ages, where science unabashedly champions progress over religious tradition. Nevertheless, when scientific practice falls into scientism, we are faced with situations eerily close to the religious fundamentalism science seeks to overcome. Linda Wiener and Ramsey Eric Ramsey offer a succinct account of scientism in their *Leaving Us to Wonder: An Essay on the Questions Science Can't Ask*. Scientism is marked by the belief "that science is the

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[24] Malise Ruthven, *Fundamentalism: A Search for Meaning* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 4-5.

proper and exclusive foundation for thinking about and answering every question." Scientism, they continue, is "a world view characterized by its authoritarian attitudes, its totalizing drive to encompass every question, and its disregard and disdain for alternative views…By scientism we understand a way of thinking and the public statements associated with it that extend the legitimacy of scientific thinking as such to issues and contexts outside the purview of science as a practice."[25] Wiener and Ramsey ground their argument in an investigation of the genetic determinism and sociobiology promoted by popular scientists such as Richard Dawkins, Daniel Dennett (both advocates of "ultra-Darwinism"), Randy Thornhill, and Craig Palmer. For these scientists, our genetic configuration not only explains our biological processes, but dictates our moral action. Scientific fundamentalism suffers the same problem as religious fundamentalism, substituting the inerrancy of the divine word made manifest for the utilization of the scientific method as the only route to acquire an understanding of the human experience. Of course, most science is not practiced in this manner, just as most religious practice is not fundamentalism.

An offshoot of scientific fundamentalism is the belief in the supremacy of economic determinism and neoliberal globalization. Nothing has ascended to replace the groundlessness left in the wake of the death of God in our age than the mechanisms of the market. Nothing has captured the American public—not the Christian ethos or Enlightenment rationalism—quite like the authority of economics and a belief in self-interest. In 1947, social philosopher Karl Polanyi warned of the dangers of a market

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[25] Linda Wiener and Ramsey Eric Ramsey, *Leaving Us to Wonder: An Essay on the Questions Science Can't Ask* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 15.

mentality. Industrialization required a reorganization of human existence and morality, but elevating the economic sphere as a mechanism through which experience could be understood reduces social relations to the safeguarding of individual interests. Polanyi writes, "Single out whatever motive you please, and organize production in such a manner as to make that motive the individual's incentive to produce, and you will have induced a picture of man as altogether absorbed by that motive…The particular motive selected will represent 'real' man."[26] A kind of individualist ethos like that of genetic determinism, the market mentality reduces the individual to a single property. The market mentality prioritizes and rewards conflict and competition to the derision of communal interest and support. This was the concern in 1947 and since then market mentality has only intensified with the development of neoliberalism.

In *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, David Harvey offers a succinct account of the political and economic impetus to contemporary neoliberalism. Beginning his examination in the post-World War II reconstruction era and the preventative measures against the re-emergence of national rivalries that led to the war, he traces the rise of "embedded liberalism." Within embedded liberalism, states regularly "intervened in industrial policy and moved to set standards for the social wage by constructing a variety of welfare systems."[27] Although it delivered high rates of economic growth in the 1950s and 1960s, embedded liberalism began to break down in the late 1960s, growth slowed, and advanced capitalist countries saw a mix of heavy inflation and unemployment due to a crisis of capital accumulation. Harvey situates neoliberalism as a project of

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[26] Karl Polanyi, "Our Obsolete Market Mentality," *Commentary* 3 (1947): 113.
[27] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 10-11.

disembedding liberalism from the state that gained primacy in the 1980s. It is important to note that Harvey adamantly argues the rise of neoliberalism was from the very beginning a project to restore class divisions in the face of redistributive social policies after the war.

Because capitalism depends on the accumulation of capital without end, problems arise whenever the economy does not expand at a high rate of growth. As Harry Magdoff and Paul Sweezy argue in *Monopoly Capital*, stagnation is an ever-present threat to capitalism. Consequently, contemporary capitalism needed to account for the stagnation after the 1950s and found a highly efficient method for doing so: financialization. Financialization, or "the shift in the gravity of the economy from production to finance" has been increasingly gaining ground since the late 1970s.[28] John Bellamy Foster and Fred Magdoff in their collection of *Monthly Review* essays, *The Great Financial Crisis*, trace the rise, and now its potential fall, of financialization. Indeed, the presence of financialization is so great Harvey makes it a constitutive feature of neoliberalism stating, "Neoliberalism meant…the financialization of everything."[29] Various crises of capitalism, such as unemployment recessions, and stock market crashes are all tied to capitalism's tendency to stagnation. Pushing this further, and aligning themselves with Magdoff and Sweezy, they argue stagnation is inherent in capitalism itself, and not merely an external problem capital faces at particular moments. Mechanisms, then, are put into place to overcome stagnation, such as imperialism, developments in technology, globalization, and the refined development of a debtor system. The financial situation with which we

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[28] John Bellamy Foster and Fred Magdoff, *The Great Financial Crisis: Causes and Consequences* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2009), 18.
[29] Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism,* 33.

are so familiar—predatory lending and the housing bubble, egregious levels of financial speculation in stocks, futures, derivatives, and currency—is all linked, on their account, to the attempt to avoid stagnation. Moreover, they see this as a new iteration of capitalism, and deserving of a new name: monopoly-finance capital. Monopoly-finance capital has implemented the following practices in an effort to avoid stagnation:

> (a) extending more and more loans to the general public and corporations; (b) lending to low-income people under very unfavorable and hard to understand terms; (c) adding debt to corporations through leveraged buyouts (making the companies more financially fragile and demanding cutbacks in jobs, wages, and benefits to compensate); (d) unbalancing trade with the rest of the world, requiring enormous sums of money to be invested in the U.S. from abroad; and (e) placing huge bets on almost anything imaginable.[30]

As Foster and Magdoff continue, with a damning understatement: "A lot of people are making money off of these activities—except for those at the bottom who are left to foot the bill when problems arise."[31] Surprisingly, the neoliberal revolution in the United States and Great Britain has been achieved through more or less democratic means. Said otherwise, neoliberalism presents itself as common sense and not a radical reorganization of power and capital for an elite few. It is pervasive in our understanding of everyday life, giving shape to our interpretations of the world and our actions. Neoliberalism, as common sense, highlights the profound faith the public has in a market mentality that assumes our motives are born of economic self-interest. Moreover, without this faith in

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[30] Foster and Magdoff, *The Great Financial Crisis*, 61.
[31] Foster and Magdoff, *The Great Financial Crisis*, 61.

economic determinism, neoliberalism would appear absurd; it is the orthodoxy of this belief that keeps in place the hegemonic element on which the system relies. Economic self-interest appears as a natural condition of human being in the world rather than one motive or mode of life among many.

Fundamentalism, whether religious, scientific, or economic, functions as a preservation of that which matters most after the secularization and fragmentation brought on in modernity: a sense of certainty. For religious fundamentalism, certainty rests in the belief in an all-powerful God; for scientific fundamentalism certainty rests in the trustworthiness of the scientific method to provide answers to the most pressing questions; for economic fundamentalism certainty rests in the conviction that economic motives underlie and ground our relationships with one another. What all three forms of fundamentalism demonstrate is the attempt to develop an unshakeable ground from which we might then give our lives stable meaning. Adam Phillips illustrates this when he writes, "The fundamental things are the things that upset us; and even though we think of our civility as constituted by our fundamental beliefs, our civility and our fundamental beliefs are easily at odds with one another."[32] Said differently, the fundamentals are those things we wish to preserve (a faith, a trust, an explanation) yet in this preservation we risk falling into mere reactionary habits. In this regard, fundamentalism tends to preserve the status quo:

> For the Fundamentalist…the structures of constraint [between what is and is not permissible] are by definition not always being drawn and redrawn, are not subject to whim or circumstance or competing vested interests. For the

[32] Phillips, "On What is Fundamental," 65.

> Fundamentalist, in this sense, there can be no such thing as progress, except perhaps the progress of keeping things as they are, under pressure: under the pressure of secularization, globalization, modernization.[33]

Fundamentalisms attempt to provide a foundation in an anti-foundationalist world, an impossible task, and a dangerous one. Fundamentalism more generally is a hermeneutic comportment. One wherein the believer (whether religious, scientific, or economic) is unable or unwilling to see beyond her traditions—her sacred texts, rites, and methods—and becomes myopically ensconced in the preservation of the status quo.

2.3.2 Cynicism

Whereas fundamentalism attempts to offer a foundation when none can be promised, cynicism is a mode of being that accepts this groundlessness with a sense of resignation. Strangely similar to fundamentalism, cynicism is a reactionary position and one with a long history that has changed dramatically over time. Although cynicism has a complicated history, I shall focus here only on its modern articulation. No one has traced the contours of cynicism more masterfully than German philosopher Peter Sloterdijk whose lengthy tome *Critique of Cynical Reason* is widely considered to be the landmark study in cynicism. For Sloterdijk, modern cynicism (in distinction to its kynical counterparts rooted in ancient Athens) finds its source in Enlightenment rationality—at the height of the metaphysics we examined earlier. The force of the Enlightenment was its power of critique, an unflagging march against illusions. Sloterdijk goes further and demonstrates how this relentless criticism led the way for new forms of dogmatism. He writes, "Enlightenment does not penetrate into social consciousness simply as an

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[33] Phillips, "On What is Fundamental," 67.

unproblematic bringer of light. Where it has an effect, a twilight arises, a deep ambivalence…the atmosphere in which, in the middle of a snarl of factual self-preservation with moral self-denial, cynicism crystalizes."[34] He characterizes eight waves, or unmaskings, of critique—by examining each briefly we will have a better sense of the context within which cynicism developed and that from which we must find room to twist-a-way.

The first critique, the critique of revelation, attacks the presumption that texts (in particular Holy Scripture) are divine and absolute. Enlightenment critique investigates this claim and demands evidence to ground the revelatory nature of the texts. Sloterdijk writes, "With the question 'How can we know that?' enlightenment severs the roots of revelatory knowledge quite elegantly, without being particularly aggressive," and consequently all texts call for interpretation and are exposed to conflicts of interpretation.[35] The absoluteness of the Absolute is brought into question. Texts become something about which we must offer a reading rather than the pure manifestation of the divine Word that requires no explanation. Consequently, we see the rise of biblical hermeneutics. The second unmasking, the critique of religious illusion, goes after religious phenomena more sharply. Here, what is uncovered is not whether or not God exists, but the attributes such a God might have. That is to say, this critique exposes the anthropomorphic characteristics of God, in particular the images of family and procreation (i.e., production) at the core of our understanding of the divine. It demonstrates that the various conceptions of God are human projections. Moreover, this

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[34] Peter Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, trans. Michael Eldred, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 22.
[35] Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 25.

critique exposes the deceptions of the priestly class by asking "Whom does religion serve, and what function does it serve in the life of society?"[36] This understanding of an instrumentalist theory of religion is essential for the development of modern, self-reflective cynicism as it shows that one can "suffer a delusion and also, undeluded, use it against others."[37] One only need think of Dostoyevsky's Grand Inquisitor to get a sense of the mechanism for this deception. Here one can see the functional necessity of illusions and Christianity becomes not merely a matter of faith, but a program of power and knowledge.

Moving beyond the religious sphere, the third unmasking, the critique of metaphysical illusion, demonstrates the limitations of reason. Whereas it was enlightenment rationality undertaking the first two movements of unmaskings, now enlightenment thinking itself is under question. As Sloterdijk explains, in investigating the ideals beyond reason, all metaphysical alternatives are of "equal value and undecidable: determinism and indeterminism; finiteness versus infinitude; the existence of God versus the non-existence of God; idealism versus materialism; and so forth."[38] In other words, we are left with a series of aporias with little guarantee of a sure way out. Enlightenment rationality leaves the individual knower in a cul de sac of paradoxes without any solution. Following this, the critique of idealistic superstructure is the fourth unmasking. Here, of course, we have the work of Marx and his critique of the ahistorical status of idealism. Consciousness is not purely free; it is comprised of social interests through and through, in particular economic relations and the power of labor. With this

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[36] Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 29.
[37] Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 29.
[38] Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 35.

unmasking we receive the idea of false consciousness, the necessity of ideology that supports and keeps mystified the ground of class society, which will become crucial to the development of modern cynicism (and which we saw was already at work in a nascent form in the critique of religious illusion). In this unmasking the entire history of philosophy, from Plato onward, is understood to have been founded on the backs of the subjugated. The fifth unmasking, the critique of moral illusion, takes us from Marx to Nietzsche by way of Christianity. This critique demonstrates the way in which morality works through double-standards (for example, rules for men of power and for those who are ruled) and reductive simplifications. Morality, upon this critique, no longer stands as a pure source of authority. Furthermore, morality is no longer something which is pure, but is the instantiation of rules that benefit the powerful elite.

The critique of transparency, or the sixth unmasking, moves us back toward the individual and the discovery of the unconscious and the final hermeneut of suspicion. When Freud and psychoanalysis more generally explicated the work of unconscious processes in all our forms of thinking and acting, he demonstrated a rift between act and intention. No longer could one claim that they know themselves better than anyone else; on the contrary, with the critique of transparency of the ego it becomes clear that we may well know ourselves the least. The seventh and related unmasking, the critique of natural illusion undermines the naturalness of what is given. In other words, it highlights the arbitrariness of human existence—that we are as we are as a result of social processes and not because it is our essence. There is no human nature to which we might have recourse; this foundation is gone and perhaps never was. The last critique against illusion is the critique of the illusion of privacy. Here the sovereign ego is under attack and

consequently the idol of identity. Sloterdijk shows, through a discussion of political identity, the way in which each class in history creates its own type of subject. In other words, referring to the previous unmasking, there is no pure identity. Sloterdijk writes,

> The mania for 'identity' seems to be the deepest of the unconscious programmings, so deeply buried that it evades even attentive reflection for a long time. A formal somebody, as bearer of our social identifications, is, so to speak, programmed into us. It guarantees in almost every aspect the priority of what is alien over what is one's own. Where 'I' seem to be, others always went before me in order to automatize me through socialization. Our true self-experience in original Nobodiness remains in this world buried under taboo and panic.[39]

Subjectivity itself comes under criticism and the insecurity of selflessness is brought to the fore. No longer reliable is the promise that we might know who we are, or that there is even a "we" after all.

I have rehearsed these eight unmaskings or critiques of illusion in order to set the stage for the advent of modern cynicism. Furthermore, these waves give further depth into the crisis of directionality to which Nietzsche gives voice. Each of these unmaskings, we might say, marks another juncture where indeterminacy seeps into the human experience and rattles each of us to the core. Each is a moment of disorientation. The ethos of enlightenment present throughout these critiques is then repudiated in the beginning of modern cynicism, on Sloterdijk's account. With enlightenment rationality comes mistrust, mistrust of religion, morality, and eventually the self—eventually we are left with little more than suspicion and suspicion is at the core of cynicism. This

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[39] Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 73.

suspicion is born out of the Enlightenment's pursuit of rationality against the pervasiveness of superstition; however, in its cynical form this suspicion is so widespread that it is nearly without content—we begin to see suspicion for suspicion's sake. To put it another way, it is not that suspicion itself is inherently problematic (there is, no doubt, much about which we ought to be suspicious), but when we allow suspicion to run rampant we find ourselves corned into cynicism. Furthermore, the problem with critique is that it is always fragmented into localized movements, without the ability to build a substantial front; indeed, as Sloterdijk argues, Enlightenment turned on itself and took itself to be its main opponent. This happens by way of a series of "breaks" in the Enlightenment, in particular the main break through "the hegemonic powers' politics of antireflection, which consciously tries to preserve the naïveté of others."[40] Enlightenment critique brings an understanding of the knowledge of power to a wider audience, but nevertheless it morphs into a kind of self-denial of morality, of a disappointment without recourse to wide-scale change. In other words, enlightenment leads to a kind of disenchantment with the world. Thus Sloterdijk writes, "Discontent in our culture appears today as universal, diffuse cynicism."[41] A cynicism that nearly feels inescapable at times.

Following his discussion of Enlightenment's turn on itself, Sloterdijk offers sketches of various characters we find in cynicism. Diogenes of Sinope, Mephistopheles, and the Grand Inquisitor all make a showing, but here I shall focus only briefly on his final characterization—the Anyone to which all belong. Sloterdijk writes, with a crushing clarity, "On earth, existence has 'nothing to search for' except itself, but where cynicism

[40] Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 83.
[41] Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 39.

rules, we search for everything but not for existence (Dasein). Before we 'really live,' we always have just one more matter to attend to, just one more position to fulfill, just one more temporarily more important wish to satisfy, just one more account to settle."[42] Furthermore, in the face of this structure of postponement and deferral, the system which makes these dreams deferred continues to run unimpeded. This insight leads us to the subject of modern diffuse cynicism: the Anyone. Sloterdijk explicitly works upon Heidegger's discussion of the They (das Man) in *Being and Time* to give a sense of character to the Anyone.[43] Sloterdijk writes,

> It [Anyone] exists, but there is 'nothing behind' it. It is there like modern, nonfigure sculptures; real, everyday, concrete part of a world but not referring at any time to an actual person, a 'real' meaning. Anyone is the neutreum of our ego: everyday ego but not 'I myself.' It represents in a certain way my public side, my mediocrity.[44]

The Anyone represents our public persona, the mask we present to others but underneath which nothing much remains. The Anyone is an individual, indeed the suspicion at the core of cynicism prevents a trust in being-together from developing and reduces any given person into an isolated cogito. The cynic embodies Thatcher's commentary that "[There is] no such thing as society, only individual men and women."[45] Consequently, in the mode of cynicism we are rarely ever with another, even if they are standing right by

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[42] Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 194.
[43] A more thorough discussion of the They, from Heidegger's perspective, is provided in the following chapters.
[44] Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 197.
[45] Douglas Keay interview with Margaret Thatcher, *Women's Own*, Sept. 23, 1987. Retrieved from: http://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/106689

us. Rather than in solidarity, we are at worst at odds and at best in a relationship of utility. Sloterdijk notes that "alienation is…the mode of being of Anyone."[46] This alienation, however, is viewed by the cynic without any moral coloring; rather, we simply are alienated and there is nothing we can do about it. The Anyone is uncanny, without a sense of authenticity, but equally without a clear desire for authenticity. The cynic is thus caught between a kind of self-certain suspicion and a muted sense of being-together.

Drawing from Marx, Sloterdijk defines cynicism as "enlightened false consciousness." Sloterdijk continues,

> It is that modernized, unhappy consciousness, on which enlightenment has labored both successfully and in vain. It has learned its lessons in enlightenment, but it has not, and probably was unable to, put them into practice. Well-off and miserable at the same time, this consciousness no longer feels affected by any critique of ideology: its falseness is already reflexively buffered.[47]

In other words, cynicism is marked by a recognition that our experience and understanding of the world is shaped by the dictates of enlightenment-turned-neoliberal global capital, and yet we rarely do anything to change our circumstances.

In this way, the contemporary character under cynicism is also marked by a deep and abiding sense of resignation. We know better than we do and yet we do not actualize such knowledge. I do not wish to argue here that the resignation stems from a feeling that we believe we deserve the way things are, and thus attempt to cope with them. Rather, this resignation develops from the belief that we simply have to "be realistic" about the

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[46] Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 201.
[47] Sloterdijk, *Critique of Cynical Reason*, 5.

way things are and understand that no sweeping changes can be made.[48] There is, it seems, a distrust of all attempts at solidarity, or the assumption that any political unification will, from the start, fail to accomplish its goals because the force of neoliberalism is too pervasive. Adorno, in his short essay "Resignation" tries to come to

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[48] Adorno and Horkheimer give us a clear look at this phenomenon in a fictionalized conversation between two young people, A and B. Person A is beholden to a kind of either/or logic and keeps pressing person B to make ridiculous claims about his future.

A. You don't want to be a doctor?
B. By their profession doctors have a lot of to with dying people; that desensitizes them. Moreover, with advanced institutionalization the doctor represents business and its hierarchy vis-à-vis the patient. He is often tempted to act as an advocate of death. He becomes an agent of big business against consumers. If one is selling automobiles it's not so bad, but if the commodity being administered is life and the consumers are the sick, that's a situation I'd prefer not to be in…
A. So you think there shouldn't be any doctors, or that the old charlatans ought to come back?
B. I did not say that. I just have a horror of being a doctor myself…Nevertheless, I do, of course, think it better to have doctors and hospitals than to leave sick people to die. I would not want to be a public prosecutor, yet giving a free run to armed robbers would seem to me a far greater evil than the existence of a body of people who put them in prison. Justice is reasonable. I am not against reason; I only want to investigate the form it has taken.
A. You are in contradiction with yourself. You yourself constantly make use of the advantages provided by doctors and judges. You are as guilty as they are. It is just that you don't want to be burdened with the work which others do for you. Your own life presupposes the principle you are trying to evade.
B. I do not deny it, but contradiction is necessary. It is a response to the objective contradiction of society. In a division of labor as complex as that of today, horror can manifest itself in one place and bring down guilt on everyone. If word of it got about, or if even a small proportion of people were aware of it, lunatic asylums and penal institutes might finally be superfluous. But that is not the reason why I want to be a writer. I just want to be clearer about the terrible state in which everything is.
A. If everyone thought as you do, and no one wanted to get his hands dirty, there would be neither doctors nor judges, and the world would be even more dreadful…

"This conversation," Adorno and Horkheimer write, "is repeated wherever someone refuses to give up thought in face of praxis." *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 198-199.

terms with the political demand in the late 1960s milieu and his distrust of activism. He states of the perception of the intellectual, "Whoever only thinks, removes himself, is considered weak, cowardly, virtually a traitor."[49] In addition to the societal distrust of the intellectual and the often false conception that she does little more than hide out in her ivory tower, in times of political action the refusal to jump headlong into a political program is not only scoffed at, it is derided. Adorno notes, "Praxis is needed, they say, precisely in order to do away with the domination by practical people and the practical ideal. But then this is quickly transformed into a prohibition on thinking."[50] For Adorno, though, what is needed now more than ever is not blatant social action, but the courage to think. Resignation, on his account, is not the seclusion of the intellectual, but the exceeding hatred of thought. He continues,

> The uncompromisingly critical thinker, who neither signs over his consciousness nor lets himself be terrorized into action, is in truth the one who does not give in. Thinking is not the intellectual reproduction of what already exists anyway. As long as it doesn't break off, thinking has a secure hold on possibility. Its insatiable aspect, its aversion to being quickly and easily satisfied, refuses the foolish wisdom of resignation.[51]

What follows, then, is an attempt at thinking; it is an attempt at thinking beyond fundamentalism and cynicism and toward a comportment that embraces simultaneously

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[49] Theodor Adorno, "Resignation," in *Critical Models: Interventions and Catchwords* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 290.
[50] Adorno, "Resignation," 290.
[51] Adorno, "Resignation," 292.

Nietzsche's dissolution of metaphysics and the ethical call that is issued forth every moment we encounter one another.

2.4 Finding Our Way

> We are like Gulliver lying stranded on the Lilliputian shore with every part of his body tied down; determined to free himself, he looks keenly around him: the smallest detail of the landscape, the smallest contour of the ground, the slightest movement, everything becomes a sign on which his escape may depend. The most certain chances of liberation are born in what is most familiar. Was it ever otherwise?
>
> Raoul Vanegeim, *The Revolution of Everyday Life*

We are not over the death of God; on the contrary, as Nietzsche's madman reminds us, we might not have even heard. "I have come too early…my time is not yet. This tremendous event is still on its way, still wandering," the madman laments. Any attempt to find our way out from this disaster must travel an arduous path avoiding both fundamentalism and cynicism in all its various manifestations.

Despite the death of god, we are not without faith. To be sure, faith is all around us. The fundamentalist still has faith, the faith of orthodoxy that comes too close to certainty when none can be granted. It is an unwise faith, but faith nevertheless. The cynic too has a strange faith, the faith in self-interest and suspicion as profitable modes of being-with others. Underlying each of these forms of faith, however, is a more elemental faith that is central to experience itself. This faith is a-theistic and unhinged from any historical religion. It is the faith to which testimony points: the faith that words still matter, even if we throw them around on the cheap. Even the most self-interested cynic presupposes some kind of faith in the other with whom she talks, a faith that her words are true. Certainly the cynic might aim to undermine these words and approach them with

suspicion, but in order for language to be intelligible we must already have faith in the hermeneutic texture of the world. Our faith in the meaningfulness of things allows any one thing to be meaningful in a particular way. This faith is bare, yes, and maybe even weak, but it makes possible so much, we might even say everything, that matters.

Let us turn to one final orienting concept to set us on our way. Gianni Vattimo in his discussions of the dissolution of metaphysics makes much of the German word of *Verwindung* ("overcoming" or "twisting-free"). He finds the earliest expressions of the concept in Nietzsche as a kind of surpassing that does not leave behind that which is being moved beyond. In *Verwindung* something is retained, Vattimo argues, like the way in which a body retains the traces of an illness even after one's symptoms have subsided. Vattimo goes beyond its expression in Nietzsche and moves to Heidegger's hermeneutical philosophy. Vattimo writes, "Being is none other than the trans-mission of historico-destinal disclosures which constitute the possibility of access to the world for humanity in each epoch. The experience of being, as the experience of responding to and of receiving, is always *An-denken* (re-thinking, meditative pondering, loving recollection) and *Verwindung* (overcoming, getting over, recuperating)."[52] Experiencing being, as a receiving, is a recuperating and overcoming; it is, in other words, a working through the past so as to move beyond it. However, rather than overcome or twist-free as the word implies, I suggest we coax the German a bit for our own purposes and consider twisting-a-way as a more tempered term.

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[52] Gianni Vattimo, "'Verwindung': Nihilism and the Postmodern in Philosophy," *SubStance* 16, no. 2 (1987): 14.

Twisting-a-way more clearly retains the inescapable tether we have to history and tradition, to the existential situatedness we have in a particular place. Indeed, twisting-a-way sees place for what it is: the true starting point for ontology and communicative ethics. We only are who we are because we are ensconced within a series of circumstances and institutions, because we are entwined within history and language. It is from out of this having-been placed, our emplacement so to speak, that we have the freedom necessary to act. To twist-free, rather than twist-a-way, would be to escape this emplacement. Such a thing is, of course, impossible. Nevertheless, we must twist-a-way from the inheritance which grants us little freedom to move, fundamentalism and cynicism. However, we find our possibilities of recourse from within the tradition that, at times, is so constraining. We twist-a-way from one element of the tradition toward something else. The tradition serves as a kind of pathway that leads us elsewhere, toward a future that is more promising than the status quo.

In order to address these dual hermeneutic comportments of restricted understanding—fundamentalism and cynicism—I suggest we twist-a-way through approaching communication from the perspective of testimony and hyperbole. Underlying both fundamentalism and cynicism is a functionalist approach to language as an exchange of information. For the fundamentalist, one is caught between absolute acceptance (of the divine word or the dictates of science or the market). The cynic, on the other hand, is either speechless in the face of a world without absolutes or, perhaps worse, treats language as another tool in the project of enlightened false consciousness. Furthermore, each rests upon a kind of self-certainty that is no longer suitable after the dissolution of foundationalist metaphysics: the self-certainty of absolutism for the

fundamentalist, and the self-certainty of self-interest for the cynic. Recalling our discussion of Derrida in our opening, the curious thing about our contemporary global circumstance is that it rests upon a faith which testimony highlights. Not the absolute faith of the fundamentalist, or the faith in self-interest of the cynic, but a broader faith which underlies them both—a faith which communication presupposes. Twisting-a-way, then, must negotiate between these twin polls of disaster and come to terms with this faith. To do so, we must examine the resources we have to understand communication otherwise.

Nothing, of course, seems more difficult than this. Twisting-a-way requires a unique interpretation of our historical communicative circumstances. Furthermore, it is a thoroughly hermeneutic position as it requires grappling with the horizon of understanding we have before us and negotiating the pluralism of possible responses. Unfortunately, making our way must occur without the foundation Nietzsche so scrupulously critiqued. There are no dictums here, only the endless unfolding of mysteries to guide our way. In this regard, I suggest we approach our task of twisting-a-way aphoristically, that is, we allow it to be tempered by the uncertainty and limitlessness of experience rather than the self-certainty of either fundamentalism or cynicism. Let us then attempt to think of communication aphoristically—not of the communication genre of the aphorism, but of communication itself as textured by the rationality of the aphorism.

Thankfully our paths to undertake this task of twisting-a-way are many. John Holloway in his recent book *Crack Capitalism* speaks to this point writing,

> *There is no Right Answer, just millions of experiments*: There is no single correct answer to the desperate (and time-honoured) question of what is to be done. Perhaps the best answer that can be given is: 'Think for yourself and yourselves, use your imagination, follow your inclinations and do whatever you consider necessary or enjoyable, always with the motto of against-and-beyond capital.' For some, this will mean throwing themselves into the preparations for the next anti-G8 summit. For others, it will mean trying to open up perspectives of a different world for the children they teach in school. Others will join with their neighbours to create a community garden, or take part in the activities of the nearby social centre. Some will dedicate all their energies to organising opposition to the extension of a motorway that threatens the livelihood of thousands of peasants, some will devote themselves to permaculture or creating free software, others will just play with their children and friends, or white a book on how to change the world. All of these are cries of hope, projections towards a different way of living, attempts to do something better with our lives than creating capitalism.[53]

The route I shall take is my own, but not mine alone. It belongs rather to a very long lineage of those who find themselves concerned with the role language and communication plays in our dwelling together with others. It is through deepening and clarifying our understanding of this ubiquitous phenomenon that we can twist our way, with a modicum of grace, through the crises of our time.

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[53] John Holloway, *Crack Capitalism* (New York: Pluto Books, 2010), 256. Italics JH.

CHAPTER 3. THE MEASURE OF BEING: APPERTURES AND APPROACHES

> *Of a discourse to come – on the to-come and repetition. Axiom: no to-come without heritage and the possibility of repeating. No to-come without some sort of iterability.*
>
> *Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge"*

3.1 Being and Communication

> The understanding of Being is nothing other than an understanding of others, which means, in every sense, understanding others through "me" and understanding "me" through others. One could say even more simply that Being is communication. But it remains to be known what 'communication' *is*.
>
> - Jean Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*

Philosophy, as the ancients taught us time and again, begins in wonder. An object of wonder rattles and provokes us. The wonder may have been brought on perhaps by witnessing a passing comet, the intricacies of a molecule, the majesty of a natural landscape or an artwork. Regardless of its originating source, wonder stirs something in us, excites us, and, I believe, moves us to speak. Wonder gives direction. For the ancient philosophers and many others, the greatest wonder was provoked by the totality of existence, namely the question: why is there something rather than nothing? In other words, the greatest wonder was the question of being. The question of being and the meaning of communication have within the history of philosophy existed in a state of continual convergence and separation both as fields and objects of study. The most succinct contemporary articulation of this relationship comes from French philosopher

Jean-Luc Nancy in his book *Being Singular Plural*, which is his re-working of Heidegger's most communicatively-oriented concept, being-with, in the fundamental ontology of *Being and Time*. As Nancy writes in the epigraph above, being is communication. Yet what still needs to be uncovered philosophically is what communication means. Consequently, this chapter shall explore through forays into fundamental ontology and philosophical hermeneutics what such a claim might hold and develop a shared vocabulary for the work that remains. In other words, I shall draw from the thinkers discussed here to cultivate the ground for the philosophical approach to communication I shall contribute. The next chapter will continue this insight and offer a philosophical account of what communication means by drawing together this philosophical history with elements from rhetorical theory to propose a theory of hyperbole.

Despite our philosophical confusion, the concept of communication appears to be self-evident—we can point to instances of communication with relative ease. Nevertheless, its ubiquity is no guarantee that the concept can be pinned down and sufficiently understood. Few words carry such weight in modern society and have such a broad scope. Communication extends from multi-billion dollar global industries to the intimacy of interpersonal relations and therapeutic sessions. Communication is a term frequently applied not only to human beings, but with greater force each day to other animals and now even plants. However, what is most striking about communication is not its pervasiveness, but that it manages to occur at all. That human beings are in relation to each other, in a social space saturated with the faith that makes words possible, is rather

miraculous. That is to say, that we say something rather than nothing is as much a wonder as being itself.

This wonder is lost or at the very least diminished, I believe, when we narrow our conceptualizations of communication to the modernist and industrialist versions with which we are so familiar and that fundamentalism and cynicism attempt to name. As a nascent discipline in the 1940s, communication research nobly focused on achieving a society with a minimum of communicative failures. However, with the rise of the telecommunications industry in the twenties and the development of information theory, communication came to be understood as a form of information exchange over or through particular channels. This desire for universal intelligibility, together with attempts at objectivity, led to what we now call the transmission model of communication. As even a passing familiarity with the discipline's history demonstrates, with Claude Shannon, Warren Weaver, and Norbert Weiner leading the way, communication became more an issue of mathematics and engineering than wisdom and *phronesis* as was the case with its earlier roots in rhetorical practice.

Largely unchallenged until much later in the discipline's history, the transmission model posits that communication is essentially a functional process of the transference or exchange of information (i.e., a message) between a sender and a receiver. This model rests on a Cartesian understanding of the subject/object distinction. In this model a sender (i.e., a subject) encodes a message (i.e., an object) and transmits through a channel that may contain within it some kind of noise or destabilizing force, to a receiver (i.e., another subject) who then decodes or translates the message. At issue is not whether communication can take this form (it can), but whether this is indeed communication in

its most basic form. That is to say, is communication reducible to information exchange. Furthermore, this model fails to take into account the conditions for its possibility (how does the sender craft the message? How does the receiver receive it? That is, what makes such a practice possible?). Moreover, because this understanding is focused on "the extension of messages in space" and "imparting information," the model reinforced a technological understanding of the phenomenon contrary to the philosophical and testimonial approach we are taking here.[1] This had its consequences. Communication scholar Stanley Deetz illuminates the situation with this observation:

> By the 1960s the functionalists' domination of communication studies in the United States was so complete that any critical analysis of the social consequences of existing communication conceptions and practices was nearly impossible. Conceptions of meaning based in reductionist psychology, concern with control and system integration, fragmented empirical observations, and preoccupation with transmission conspired together to make impossible a rich theoretical understanding of the social historical nature of modern communication practice…Attempts to reform this tradition with new concepts, in most cases, either provide technical solutions within the dominant conception (e.g., feedback loops and meditational processes), reaffirmed existing assumptions (e.g., focus on

[1] James W. Carey, *Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 18.

receiver interpretive processes), or generated no systematic development or research (e.g., process conceptions).[2]

To be sure, few within the field still espouse this functionalist view with much commitment. Nevertheless, we find it frequently in textbooks for introductory level undergraduate courses without the criticism necessary to demonstrate communication extends far beyond the narrow tendencies of information exchange. Why teach what we ourselves seem not to believe? Moreover, non-scholars continue to implicitly connect communication with information. In this project, simply put, we shall not understand communication this way. Instead, we shall turn our attention to a fuller conceptualization of communication that is granted to us by the linguistic turn in the history of philosophy. To clarify, communication can certainly be an exchange of information; however, this act is derivative of a deeper understanding of communication as testimony.

To give shape to this claim, in this chapter I shall explore the work of three philosophers for whom being and communication are so closely intertwined that at times the concepts appear synonymous: Martin Heidegger, Karl Jaspers, and Hans-Georg Gadamer. Furthermore, each of these thinkers challenges information theory in their own way and open communication to a far more pervasive role in both philosophical scholarship and everyday life. In this sense, they offer an alternative aperture through which we are able to examine the phenomenon of communication. Said differently, each provides a different texture to communication, drawing some elements to the fore while allowing others to recede into the background. I turn here to these twentieth century

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[2] Stanley Deetz, *Democracy in an Age of Corporate Colonization: Developments in Communication and the Politics of Everyday Life* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 6.

continental philosophers before I turn to my direct contemporaries with whom I'm in conversation—in particular Gianni Vattimo and Jean-Luc Nancy—so as to set a historical backdrop for my approach to understanding communication philosophically in chapter three. I wish to sketch out here a constellation of terms and interpretations that are more or less presupposed by those doing ontological investigations of communicative praxis today and that will remain in use throughout this project. To be sure, every explication is itself an interpretation—such is the great lesson of hermeneutics—and I shall read these three thinkers with an eye toward tempering our understanding of communication with the textures of testimony.

3.2 Communication as Disclosure: Martin Heidegger

> Being
> in excess
> wells up
> in my heart.
>
> Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies*

The expectation of perfect consistency between moments within a writer's corpus is an expectation rarely fulfilled. More so, it is an expectation we would do well to abandon. As Hannah Arendt writes in *The Human Condition*, "Fundamental and flagrant contradictions rarely occur in second-rate authors; in the work of the great authors they lead into the very center of their work."[3] Exact correspondence between a thinker's ideas over time is far too static and demonstrative of a mind that has failed to expand with the times and its ever-changing circumstances. We need expansive thinkers, even if such expanse leaves pressing questions to be approached only obliquely. In the same spirit, let

[3] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 104.

us recall Deleuze and Guattari's insight at the beginning of *Thousand Plateaus*: "The two of us wrote *Anti-Oedipus* together. Since each of us was several, there was already quite a crowd."[4] In the all too crowded practice of thinking and writing, perhaps there is something to be had in being content with hints and glimpses of the philosophic issues of ultimate concern.

Among those thinkers of the expanse who push up against the limits of our so-called common sense and who force us to stretch our understandings so as to account truthfully for our experiences—for how they are and not how we might wish them to be—we find Martin Heidegger. The question of how many Heideggers one might find over the course of his life's work has no doubt been both a popular and disputed one. For William Richardson there were two Heideggers—marked by the *Kehre* occurring around 1930 wherein Heidegger abandons the phenomenologically oriented existential-analytic of Dasein.[5] For Calvin Schrag there were three: a movement from the quest for the meaning of being, to the truth of being, to the erasure of being—all indicated by a shift away from the analytic of Dasein toward the poetic unfolding of language.[6] Yet Schrag makes room for more, stating, "There could indeed be four Heideggers, five Heideggers, or possibly more. Might there not be multiple Heideggers, at times conjugated, in league

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[4] Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).
[5] William Richardson, *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Press, 1963).
[6] Calvin O. Schrag, "The Three Heideggers," *Philosophical Papers: Betwixt and Between* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

with each other, and at other times differentiated and disparate?"[7] Said differently, perhaps there are as many Heideggers as there are questions we might pose to his thought.

I raise the question of the multiplicity of Heideggers not to add my voice to the chorus—I will remain silent on how many Heideggers I think there are—but simply to clear a way to track down one Heidegger in particular, namely the Heidegger who emerges when he is trying to think through the question of communication. Consequently, in dealing with this Heidegger, I will focus my attention in two parts. First, I will focus on his early work where the issue of communication is raised, primarily *Being and Time* (1927) and his earlier lectures at Marburg published as *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy* (1924). Following this, I will pause and turn to Jaspers and Gadamer, both of whom were directly influenced by this early work. Doing so will offer some nuance to Heidegger's early position on communication. I will then return to Heidegger once more to examine his shift in understanding communication within his later writings. This approach, although seemingly disjointed as Heidegger will undergo an interruption, allows for a clearer visualization of the increasingly poetic and poeticized understanding of communication and being that develops in the continental philosophical tradition, the one of concern to me in this work and to which I shall make a contribution by theorizing the phenomenon of testimony.

Allow me to work in an untimely manner, beginning with Heidegger's popularized conception of communication in his early work. As we recall from the previous chapter, Heidegger sets out in the fundamental ontology of *Being and Time* to raise the question of the meaning of being. He does so by maintaining the ontological

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[7] Schrag, "The Three Heideggers," 162.

difference between being and beings, and situates Dasein as that privileged being for whom being itself is an issue. Wrenching being away from its understanding through substance ontology, Heidegger takes a hermeneutical and phenomenological approach. Within the pages of *Being and Time*, communication finds its most explicit and sustained treatment in §33: "Assertion as a Derivative Mode of Interpretation." There Heidegger argues assertions—which are at root a judgment—are grounded upon understanding. In other words, an interpretive understanding has always taken place already and it is from out of this preliminary understanding that an interpretation can be laid out concretely. Said differently, any given assertion is dependent upon the hermeneutical "as" (i.e., taking something as something) which necessarily occurs before the assertion. Traditionally, assertion has three primary significations: (1) pointing-out or sharing-forth [*Aufzeigen*]; (2) predication; and (3) communication. *Aufzeigen* refers to the way in which an entity is seen from itself. Heidegger offers once an example of a hammer. When we assert that "The hammer is too heavy" we are not merely attributing a meaning to an object, but more primordially we are discovering the entity as it is as ready-to-hand (i.e., as it is in a project). The showing is not a representation but an uncovering of the entity. Predication, the second signification of assertion is perhaps our most common understanding. Here a subject is given a definite character by the attachment of a predicate. Returning to the hammer, which stands here as the subject, it takes on the character of being "too heavy." The attribution of a predicate restricts and limits our seeing or interpretation of the entity—if it is "too heavy" we are, for example, limited in seeing it as light. The situation is, as Heidegger notes, "dimmed," moving from the hermeneutic as to the apophantical as—i.e., the structure of propositional speaking—thus

allowing the character of the entity to be lit up against the darkness of what has fallen out of the boundaries of the predication. The character of the hammer is lit up against the boundaries of what the hammer is not.

On the heels of these two primary significations of assertion comes communication [*Mitteilung*]. Communication is "letting someone see with us what we have pointed out by way of giving it a definite character…that which is 'shared' is our *Being towards* what has been pointed out—a Being in which we see it in common."[8] This is not the granting of a predicate, but the seeing-together in common of what stands forth to be seen. In its having been communicated, that which is asserted is open to being retold and expanded further. Communication is thus the third derivation of an already derivative moment of interpretation. Schrag, and I find him quite persuasive here, accounts for this subordination of communication by arguing Heidegger was still tied to the project of Husserlian phenomenology and "seeking to deconstruct it from within."[9] Although communication no doubt in the main receives short shrift in *Being and Time* if we limit our focus to §33, I do not believe we need to wait for Heidegger II in order to acquire a thicker description of communication; we find further glimpses of it within *Being and Time* and perhaps more strangely, we can find it in an earlier work, his *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy* wherein he works through a significant swath of Aristotle's corpus and lays the groundwork for *Being and Time.* Most remarkable about this text, as least from my perspective, is that Heidegger gives an unprecedentedly large share of attention to Aristotle's *Rhetoric,* utilizing the concepts found therein to develop

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[8] Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1962), 197.
[9] Schrag, "The Three Heideggers," 168.

his soon to be famous concepts of concern, care, and being-in-the-world by focusing on speaking-with-one-another. Before we turn there, however, a few more words about words in *Being and Time*.

This limited discussion of communication as a primary signification of assertion leads Heidegger to address concepts of "saying" and "speaking" and to take up language explicitly as a theme in the existential analytic of Dasein and the constitution of Dasein's disclosedness. Underlying both interpretation and thus assertion is discourse. Heidegger writes of the three primary constituents of being-in-the-world, "State-of-mind and understanding are characterized equiprimordially by discourse."[10] This puts Heidegger and us along with him in the curious position of stating that discourse underlies communication as communication is a derivative moment within interpretation. What could this possibly mean? In what way is communication, that most basic of all practices, underpinned by discourse or talk? It is here where we find an interesting moment of paradox, if not contradiction. It appears that discourse is constitutive of both state-of-mind and understanding even though Heidegger will go on later in the text to claim "the existential-ontological foundation of language is discourse or talk," which is "existentially equiprimordial with state-of-mind and understanding," if one was attempting to give a hierarchy.[11] On the surface at least, the position of communication is unclear. We must take care to note however that Heidegger is working with multiple terms that we would do well to avoid conflating, at least at first: language and discourse (*Rede*) on the one hand, and communication (*Mitteilung*) on the other. We must avoid

[10] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 172.
[11] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 203.

becoming caught in this terminological thicket, or at the very least make an attempt to clear ourselves a space even if we find in the end that the thicket is unavoidable. This becomes all the more thorny, of course, when throughout *Being and Time* the terms appear synonymous, as for example in the following passage:

> Communication is never anything like a conveying of experiences, such as opinions or wishes, from the interior of one subject into the interior of another. Dasein-with is already essentially manifest in a co-state-of-mind and a co-understanding. In discourse, Being-with becomes 'explicitly' *shared*; that is to say, it *is* already, but it is unshared as something that has not been taken hold of and appropriated.[12]

In this critique of the functionalist perspective, Heidegger clearly offers a richer articulation of communication than most of the philosophical tradition up to that point could. Communication is expressly not the transference of information between encapsulated subjects as the transmission model of communication so fervently declaims. Indeed, such communication would be impossible as it fails to account for the world that makes possible the communicative event; moreover, Heidegger leaves behind Husserlian phenomenology as this is in many respects a critique of the Fifth Meditation of Husserl's *Cartesian Meditations*. Communication understood in this respect makes manifest our being-with; it does not need to be accounted for theoretically nor does it need to be put into practice—it is there from the start.

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[12] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 205. [Emphasis in original].

To address this complicated question of the relationship between discourse, language, and communication I suggest we turn our attention to the overarching phenomenon Heidegger is trying to capture with these terms: λόγος (logos).[13] Approaching communication from this avenue might bring into relief the way in which these terms are working with and at odds with each other. Since the second introduction of Being and Time, Heidegger has set his sights on clarifying λόγος in the process of raising the question of the meaning of being. This makes good sense as Dasein—the being for whom being itself is an issue—is as it is and who it is in relation to λόγος. Recalling Aristotle, whose influence on Heidegger is immeasurable and itself worthy of sustained exploration, human beings are ζῶον λόγον ἔχον (zoon logon echon), often translated as the living beings who have reason. Yet we know "reason" is but one of countless translations for λόγος (indeed, I've heard there are upwards of eighty different terms that would be a suitable replacement given the proper context). For Heidegger this rendition of Aristotle's claim is not false per se, "but it covers up the phenomenal basis for this definition of 'Dasein.' Man shows himself as the entity which talks."[14] To make sense of this we can now turn to his 1924 summer session lectures in Marburg, published as Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy, where he offers the following definition to describe the fundamental significance of *zoon logon echon*:

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[13] Given the linguistic and historical complexity of the term, I have decided to preserve λόγος in the original Greek rather than transliterate into "logos" or, even more problematic, assign it an English equivalent.
[14] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 208-209.

> At best, an approximately corresponding definition would be: the human being is a living thing that reads the newspaper. At first, that may sound strange to you, but it is what corresponds to the Greek definition. When the Greeks say that the human being is the living thing that speaks, they do not mean, in a physiological sense, that he utters definite sounds. Rather, the human being is the living thing that has its genuine being-there in conversation and in discourse.[15]

This delightful insight of Heidegger's, demonstrates that despite being the essential characteristic of human being-in-the-world, there is nothing extraordinary about this definition. Speaking, for Heidegger, is not an issue of physiology. It matters little that we are capable of uttering sounds, or at least it is not this uttering which gives human being its fundamental significance.[16] On the contrary, prior to any linguistic capability is the facticity of being-there in discourse. In other words, the being-there of Dasein is opened up within and through conversation. "Language is possessed, is spoken, in such a way that speaking belongs to the genuine drive of being of the human being," Heidegger claims, and "Living, for the human being, means speaking."[17] We are who we are when we are communicating. That is to say, communication is not something within which we are sometimes and out of which we might be later, but it is our fundamental grasp of being-in-the-world as Dasein. Furthermore, "Where there is no longer speaking, where speaking stops, where the living being no longer speaks, we speak of 'death'"[18] The

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[15] Martin Heidegger, *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, trans. Robert D. Metcalf and Mark B. Tanzer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 74.
[16] That is to say, it is not symbol-use that makes human beings unique. Language goes beyond use and becomes a form (perhaps the only form) of world disclosure.
[17] Heidegger, *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, 16.
[18] Heidegger, *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, 16.

silence that comes along with death is not merely the inability to once again utter words, but it is the complete eradication of future possibilities of dwelling in the world communicatively. It is through speaking, being amidst and awash in words, that human beings live out their essence.

Moreover, Heidegger's description of human beings understood as those who read the newspaper makes explicit how discourse makes possible the sharing of a world in common. As Heidegger states, "Λόγος as 'discourse' means rather the same as δηλσύν: to make manifest what one is 'talking about' in one's discourse."[19] That is to say, discourse brings into relief, in a manner able to be understood and shared, the worlding of the world taking place in common. In this way, discourse brings the world near and from out of this nearness we can talk about it. Or, said otherwise, discourse makes explicit Dasein's being-in-the-world. Relating clearly discourse to communication once more, Heidegger writes,

> The λόγος, which has this functioning of exhibiting [the world], has the character of a definite communicating. I communicate with others; I have the world there with the other and the other has the world there with me, in so far as we talk something through—κοινωνία. Speaking is, in itself, communicating; and as communication, it is nothing other than κοινωνία.[20]

Now a fourth term is added to the mix: communication, discourse, λόγος, and κοινωνία (*koinonia*). *Koinonia* is the Greek word for communion. A term shared by ancient philosophy and early Christian thought alike, *koinonia* implies a partnership or fellowship,

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[19] Heidegger, *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, 56.
[20] Heidegger, *Basic Concepts of Aristotelian Philosophy*, 43.

a joint participation in a shared project. Communication, then, is the joint participation in the shared project of dwelling in the world together.

At this point, keeping an analytic separation between the various terms at play in trying to name this phenomenon of sharing a world is teetering on futility. Perhaps the difficulty with words here points not merely to an inconsistency within Heidegger's writing, but an inconsistency born of trying to express expression and its conditions of possibility. In other words, no single word will do in trying to pin down the larger phenomenon at work that we call language, discourse, communication, or shared participation. In this regard, I will use, from here on out, these terms more or less interchangeably. Throughout this project, to say communication is to say simultaneously language, understood as I understand Heidegger to describing it.

It is communication that makes possible keeping the there of being-there open and shared in common. In this way, the understanding of communication we are getting at here most closely aligns with Heidegger's conception of *aletheia* or uncovering.[21] It is communication that makes possible the sharing manifest in co-attunement and co-understanding. This is why for Heidegger, and we along with him, everything is at stake in how we understand communication. Indeed, as he will later go on to say in *What is Called Thinking?*, "With a worn out language everybody can talk about everything."[22] This is not a facile critique of the democratization of language but rather a profound concern that with the wearing down of language—i.e., with the reduction of

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[21] I have written about the relationship between communication and *aletheia* at length. See Sturgess, "Death, Rebirth, and a Sense of Ease: Hermeneutic Truth After Heidegger," in *Studia Philosophia Christianae* 50, no. 1, 29-49.

[22] Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking*?, trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper Perennial, 1968), 127.

communication to idle chatter—the essence of communication is covered over. No longer does communication keep open our being-there in its fundamental vulnerability and exposure, but communication is reduced to nothing more than information exchange between subjects, and thus smuggles back in the view of communication in which so many say they do not believe. Indeed, it makes all too easy the slip into fundamentalism or cynicism. Communication is not information exchange but the explicit making manifest our possibilities for action. In other words, communication as the joint participation of being-in-the-world is the disclosure of possibility itself.

Moreover, Dasein has its possibilities disclosed to it through a history of communicative events. Or said differently, the historicity of Dasein is made meaningful through communicative practices. Heidegger gets at this near the conclusion of *Being and Time* when he states, "Only in communicating and in struggling does the power of destiny become free."[23] Destiny, the communal project of our dwelling in the world understandingly together, becomes free—that is, it becomes what it itself essentially is—through communication and its struggles. Destiny is not some preordained trajectory within which human beings are placed, but destiny is the force of history as it continues to disclose world. Destiny is communicative and communication is shaped by destiny.

With my thematizing of Heidegger's contribution to thinking the relationship between being and communication at hand, let us now turn to two inheritors of Heidegger who take up this relationship and mobilize it toward their own projects. In doing so, I shall offer a historical and conceptual backdrop to the understanding of communication I will propose in the next chapter. The number of inheritors of Heidegger, and the

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[23] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 436.

phenomenological project more generally, are great. One could certainly choose an alternate set of thinkers to work with. The following early inheritors readily come to mind: Georges Gusdorf, Paul Ricoeur, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Jacques Derrida among others. However, I have chosen to focus on Jaspers and Gadamer as their projects most closely align with my own and grant me a vocabulary that makes way for understanding communication as testimony.

3.3 Communication as Loving Struggle: Karl Jaspers

> If in communicating a thought, one fluctuates between absolute comprehension and absolute incomprehension, then this process might already be termed a philosophical friendship. For it's no different with ourselves.
>
> Friedrich Schlegel, *Philosophical Fragments*

The relationship between Martin Heidegger and his contemporary Karl Jaspers was a tenuous friendship at best, and one that degenerated into a terminal standoff as a result of deep political disagreement when Heidegger declared his sympathies for the National Socialists in 1933. Beyond this pressing political impasse, Heidegger and Jaspers had few positive commentaries for each other with respect to their philosophical projects as their friendship began to wane. Nevertheless, their work is often put into conversation with one another, as they were both early shapers of existentialism (even if Heidegger refused the label and Jaspers refused association with Heidegger). More importantly for our purposes here, both were concerned with the question of being and Jaspers, too, found being and communication to be of a pair in philosophical thinking.

Drawing from his earlier studies in psychology, Jaspers was preeminently interested in issues of self-knowledge. In his most substantial body of literature, a three-volume work titled *Philosophy*, Jaspers attempts to show the progression of knowledge

and modes of life towards higher levels of self-being, in a style not wholly unlike Kant's systematic critical philosophy. In general, Jaspers's philosophy is characterized as Existenz-philosophy, elucidating themes within the larger philosophical movement of existentialism. Existenz is a notoriously difficult term to define; indeed, most of Jaspers's philosophy eludes definition and purposely so as it seeks to reconnect us with the unobjectifiable. As William Earle writes helpfully in the introduction to Jaspers's *Reason and Existenz*, "Existenz is an index; it names without characterizing."[24] Like smoke indicates but is not itself a fire, so Existenz names without being that which is named. Before we can clarify the meaning of Existenz, which will lead us in the end to communication, we must first turn to a few key ideas in Jaspers's philosophical project, foremost among them his conception of the Encompassing. Jaspers writes,

> The Encompassing is not a horizon within which every determinate mode of Being and truth emerges for us, but rather that within which every particular horizon is enclosed as in something absolutely comprehensive which is no longer visible as a horizon at all.[25]

We shall return to the notion of horizon in our discussion of Gadamer, however, for Jaspers, the Encompassing grounds our understanding of being but cannot be conceptually grasped. It exceeds our understanding. Moreover, for Jaspers, it is beyond both subject and object and encircles them both. It is prior to all knowledge—the Encompassing is the way through which being becomes present. With this understanding

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[24] Karl Jaspers, *Reason and Existenz: Five Lectures*, trans. William Earle (New York: Noonday Press, 1955), 11.
[25] Jaspers, *Reason and Existenz*, 52.

of the inexhaustible ground of being, the concept of Existenz grants us further insight into Jaspers transcendentally inclined project. Jaspers writes, Existenz

> is the Encompassing, not in the sense of the vastness of a horizon of all horizons, but rather in the sense of a fundamental origin, the condition of selfhood without which all the vastness of Being becomes a desert. Existenz, although never itself becoming an object or form, carries the meaning of every mode of the Encompassing.[26]

Existenz cannot be objectified but is the condition necessary for objectification itself. Moreover, Existenz is oriented toward the self as "the will to be authentic."[27] Existenz is a distinctly human endeavor. Importantly for Jaspers' philosophy, despite being a human endeavor, Existenz is not a mere subjectivism and is in relation to two forms of transcendence that prevent subjectivism: being as the other that we are not (i.e., the world) and consciousness as such, which is not reducible to the empirical world. Earle offers greater clarification, stating that what Existenz names

> is not the individual in his organic vitality, his abstract understanding, or his spirit; it is the individual himself, as he comprehends himself, in his freedom and authenticity standing before Transcendence. It is the ultimate ground, basis, or root of each historical self; it is not the content of any concept.[28]

Transcendence tempers the entirety of the human experience. The purpose of Jaspers' philosophical project, then, is to illuminate Existenz and its historical manifestations so as to disclose the forms of the Encompassing within which human beings find themselves.

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[26] Jaspers, *Reason and Existenz*, 61.
[27] Jaspers, *Reason and Existenz*, 62.
[28] Jaspers, *Reason and Existenz*, 11.

In the second volume of *Philosophy*, "The Illumination of Existence," Jaspers directly takes up the phenomenon of communication and gives it an existentially significant role for human being in the world. Communication and Existenz go hand in hand—communication makes manifest Existenz. For both Heidegger and Jaspers, then, communication and manifestation are intrinsically related to one another. Jaspers is not concerned with communication in all of its forms but with communication as it is understood with respect to self-being. To this end, Jaspers draws a distinction between everyday communication (which we might understand here as the transmission of information or Heidegger's communication as assertion) with "true" or existential communication "in which I begin to know my being as I bring it about jointly with another" and upon which everyday communication rests.[29] Communication of this existential sort does not exist empirically for Jaspers except at the bounds of observation. True communication is a form of self-awareness requiring a leap of faith and a commitment of one's whole being. Because true communication occurs at the boundaries of observable experience, it is, consequently, exceedingly difficult to describe. At best, Jaspers can point to its limitations and gives us glimpses and hints at the workings of Existenz. In everyday or unexistential communication we witness the shortcomings of communication: too easily we mistake our sociality for an encounter with Existenz. Jasper's tells us of the profundity of encountering another,

> in the encounters of one possible Existenz with another, in the way they touch and pass each other by, lies an essential significance transcending all

[29] Karl Jaspers, *Philosophy*, Vol. 2., trans. E.B. Ashton (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), 48.

> comprehensibility in the world. An omission that is like a loss, because a hand was held out to us and we shook it only socially, but not existentially.[30]

That is to say, in our encounters with others we fail to see them as the radically other being that they are. The other is unique and absolutely singular and thus existential communication is unique and singular, unable to be reiterated across contexts. Consequently, communication "occurs between two selves which are nothing else, are not representative, and are therefore not interchangeable. In this communication, which is absolutely historic and unrecognizable from outside, lies the assurance of selfhood."[31] As a result, the decision to avoid opportunities for true communication is tantamount to surrendering one's possibilities for self-being. Moreover, because existential communication is each time singular our opportunities for communication are limited—we cannot communicate with a large number—we will inevitably fail to do justice to the situation. In other words, our opportunities are limited and the stakes are great. Each communicative encounter is to be taken seriously as it is radically finite.

In communication, through an intertwining of loneliness and desire for communion, we are revealed and made manifest to ourselves and likewise the other is too brought forth as she is. For Jaspers, the realization of oneself in the manifestation of the other is "a unique struggle, combative and loving at once."[32] The loving struggle of communication is allowing oneself to be thrown into question, to open oneself to risk without reservation. Consequently, communication—grounded in a profound loneliness—brings forth an equally unsurpassed solidarity. Critically for Jaspers the

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[30] Jaspers, *Philosophy*, 53.
[31] Jaspers, *Philosophy*, 54.
[32] Jaspers, *Philosophy*, 59.

struggle in this loving struggle is not the combat of Existenz versus Existenz, but the struggle to attain truth together. Existential communication requires equality, trust, and free response. Moreover, although the goal of communication is truth, the content of this truth is unable to be calculated in advance. That is to say, existential communication is always a surprise of sorts. This incalculability leads to the impossibility of absolute communication; Jaspers states of the communicative struggle,

> I want to find the right word, but I have to keep searching. The word will not have been said by the time we die; the crucial thing will not have been done—in truth there has been no absolute communication.[33]

Communication is a perpetual task without end. Always in relation with one another, we continually respond always knowing that our responses will never be entirely fitting and that we will be called upon to respond once more. Existential communication requires the ability to dwell within silence—one who cannot be peaceably silent is not ready for communication. Often this silence is that of wanting to say more, but knowing more cannot be said. Or perhaps it is the silence of not knowing what to say. Or more pressingly, the silence of what cannot be said; the unsayable says as much as words themselves.

With this understanding at hand, the power of communication for Jaspers is that "communication liquefies all things, to let new solidities emerge."[34] To this end, communication demands a flexibility and willingness to be open. Existential communication, unable to be calculated in advance, is not fixed and thus requires the

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[33] Jaspers, *Philosophy*, 67.
[34] Jaspers, *Philosophy*, 69.

flexibility necessary to give oneself over to the communicative event. Equally, communication requires the readiness to squander oneself, to give oneself without reserve.[35] Of course, this highlights the risk of potentially losing oneself in the communicative event, of giving without the expectation of return. Here lies what Jaspers terms "the turning point of all communication." He writes,

> It is here that I either take the risk of vanishing from the other as a reality so as to reemerge out of my true potential, or that I hide because I do not want to be naked, not before the other and not before myself. I will either realize my potential with the other or relapse, alone, into mere existence.[36]

The risk of existential communication faces a series of barriers. Foremost among them is the fear to communicate mentioned above, but equally we risk avoiding self-existence and fall prey to the comfortable isolation brought about by the pleasure of material goods and prestige. In other words, we fail to put ourselves at risk before the presence of the other. Moreover, as discussed above, existential communication carries with it no rules of conduct; no handbook of existential communication will be found at university bookstores. Rather, communication demands the *phronesis* or practical wisdom that springs from the situation itself.

In Jaspers we find the early groundwork for the impossibility of communication. Although it is Jacques Derrida who gives this understanding its flesh, we see in Jaspers the way in which existential communication is up against a series of barriers nearly impenetrable. Absolute communication is itself impossible. In liquefying all things,

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[35] This idea of giving without reserve or squandering will feature prominently in the following chapter as the structure of communication is explored in its hyperbolic form.
[36] Jaspers, *Philosophy*, 74.

communication makes room for new actualities. From Jaspers we receive the language of excess and inexhaustibility, of boundaries and limits, and the general risk we take when we explore the world together with words. In the main, we have a tempering force, an understanding of communication that lessens the strength of communication as mere information exchange and opens communication toward other interpretive possibilities. As we shall see in the following chapter, we will call this force testimony.

Jaspers concern for communication goes beyond his desire to clarify to the existential conditions for dwelling in the world. On its own, this is already without doubt a great contribution to the philosophizing of communicative practice. Beyond this, however, Jaspers believes the readiness for communication to be the premise of doing philosophy. Indeed, communicability becomes a criterion for the value of philosophic truth. He writes, "A philosophizing born of self-becoming requires a specific truth criterion, nonobjective in kind: *a thought is philosophically true to the extent to which its thinking promotes communication.*"[37] Doing philosophy in conversation with others, "symphilosophizing," means taking to heart the concerns of another Existenz. Here communication becomes an explicitly ethical task. To study communication is consequently and simultaneously to study ethics. The original impulse of philosophy, its function as a way of life, is lost in the mere back and forth of argumentation over conceptual machinations. Jaspers as no patience for this compulsion, writing "this unexistential, unessential, intellectually indoctrinated barbarism is made possible by the transformation of philosophy into a matter of purely rationalistic, timelessly existing

[37] Jaspers, *Philosophy*, 97. Italics KJ.

objectivity."[38] Not unlike Heidegger, for Jaspers it is through existential communication that the truth of being can be made manifest. He states with eloquence the closing words of his investigation of communication "the unobjectifiable measure of the truth of all philosophizing is always the communication which it effects and elucidates. The basic question comes to be this: what thoughts are needed to make the most profound communication possible?"[39] For Jaspers then, philosophy takes communication to be the phenomenon toward which we must turn our attention most pressingly. Communication conditions and makes possible self-being and undergirds our relations with others.

3.4 Communication as Being that Can Be Understood: Hans-Georg Gadamer

> Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and young, would be inevitable.
>
> Hannah Arendt, *The Crisis in Education*

Perhaps no philosopher of communication is more directly influenced by Heidegger's thinking than Hans-Georg Gadamer. Gadamer, who was among Heidegger's students along with Hannah Arendt, Hans Jonas, Karl Löwith, and Helene Weiss, and present at the 1924 lectures in Marburg, considered himself primarily a scholar on Plato. Although his Plato scholarship is rewarding, his magnum opus, *Truth and Method*, irreversibly changed the study and practice of hermeneutics. Hermeneutics began as an intellectual practice concerning the nature and interpretation of texts. The hermeneutic tradition has its roots in classical Greece, named after the messenger god Hermes, where it was the practical art involved "in such things as preaching, interpreting other languages,

[38] Jaspers, *Philosophy*, 99.
[39] Jaspers, *Philosophy*, 103.

explaining and explicating texts." The *hermeneus* (interpreter) translated "something foreign or unintelligible into the language everybody speaks and understands."[40] It was also closely connected to the mantic art of transmitting the will of the gods and the reading of signs. However, with the Reformation and the rise of modernity, the impetus of hermeneutics shifted from translation to finding the original meaning of a sacred text, or, in non-sacred texts such as legal codes, finding the authentic, correct interpretation (e.g., in juridical hermeneutics). By the time we reach Friedrich Schleiermacher in the early nineteenth century, hermeneutics becomes conceived as a universal doctrine of understanding and interpretation wherein the task is to reproduce the original intellectual act of the author's production of the meaning in a text. Understanding a text requires understanding the author's intent and state of mind.

A profound reorientation of hermeneutics was precipitated first by Wilhelm Dilthy and then Heidegger, who developed his "hermeneutics of facticity" in claiming *Existenz* is the self-projecting by the self of its possibilities. Heidegger locates hermeneutics within his project of fundamental ontology in his explication of the fore-structure of understanding. Understanding for Heidegger is, as we recall in *Being and Time*, constitutive of Dasein's being-in-the-world in conjunction with state-of-mind and discourse (cf. Part V "Being-in as Such"). In his description of understanding, Heidegger turns to the now well-known concept of the hermeneutic circle stating,

> [The hermeneutic circle] is not to be reduced to the level of a vicious circle, or even a circle which is merely tolerated. In the circle is hidden a positive

[40] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Classical and Philosophical Hermeneutics," in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of Later Writings*. Edited by Richard Palmer (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 44.

> possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing, and we genuinely grasp this possibility only when we have understood that our first, last, and constant task in interpreting is never to allow our fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions, but rather to make the scientific theme secure by working out these fore-structures in terms of the things themselves.[41]

With this passage as a point of departure, Gadamer takes hermeneutics even further. In *Truth and Method* he moves from Heidegger's fundamental ontology and the meaning of being to the project of historicizing understanding itself. Imperatively, Gadamer is not trying to elaborate a set of rules for the practice of hermeneutics, but is attempting to elaborate understanding, the very ground of hermeneutics. In other words, and reframing it within Kantian language, Gadamer attempts to set forth a theory of hermeneutic experience so as to uncover the conditions for the possibility of understanding. As he writes in the foreword to the second edition of *Truth and Method*, "My investigation is not to offer a general theory of interpretation and a differential account of its methods…but to discover what is common to all modes of understanding."[42] Indeed, it as we shall see, it is understanding which brings together being and communication.

Understanding is always understanding within a historical context and made possible through an interaction with history and tradition within, through, and by way of language. For Gadamer, coming to an understanding of a text parallels our coming to an understanding and making meaning of the world, that is, the ontological structure of

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[41] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 195.
[42] Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum Books, 2006), xxviii.

understanding our being-in-the-world is fundamentally a process of always already interpreting the world through a conversation with the tradition. This work is a work of love, in the sense articulated by Jaspers above, as hermeneutics attends to the text in the project of coming to terms with its meanings in relation to our own historical circumstances. The hermeneutical task is an interplay between questioning and response, undergirded by a radical openness to the alterity of the text, and for the sake of achieving a fusion of horizons. Said within the vocabulary of Heidegger's fundamental ontology, we are always already projecting meaning into our experiences of understanding—we are projecting our fore-conceptions upon what is before us to be understood. However, as Gadamer insists, "understanding realizes its full potential only when the fore-meanings that it begins with are not arbitrary."[43] Fore-meanings must always be questioned, examined, and criticized—struggled with—for the sake of understanding. Gadamer continues, exposing the critical moment in hermeneutics,

> Thus it is quite right for the interpreter not to approach the text directly, relying solely on the fore-meaning already available to him, but rather explicitly to examine the legitimacy—that is, the origin and validity—of the fore-meanings dwelling within him.[44]

The issue of the legitimacy or illegitimacy of fore-meanings moves Gadamer toward a rehabilitation of prejudice, a concept imperative for understanding our historical situatedness within tradition. Additionally, it makes way for an understanding of language more broadly thought.

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[43] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 270.
[44] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 270.

For Gadamer, prejudice is not merely the inability to embrace a quasi-neoliberal notion of tolerance nor a series of mistaken assumptions, but rather the condition for the possibility of understanding oneself in relation to history and tradition, which is to say a necessary condition for understanding anything at all. The Enlightenment aligned prejudice with superstition and thus as something to be overcome at all costs, rather than something to be examined in its complexity—accordingly, Gadamer notes, "Enlightenment's fundamental prejudice is against the concept of prejudice itself."[45] Striving for the objective certainties upon which understanding can be based, the Enlightenment overlooked the role of prejudice in coming to an understanding and aligned prejudice with illegitimate authority or overhastiness in our knowledge and decisions. Furthermore, for the Enlightenment, specifically the Cartesian protocols for advancing in both knowledge and freedom through clear and distinct ideas, judgments are only legitimate by adhering to a methodology—precisely the scientific methodology Gadamer wishes to critique throughout the entirety of *Truth and Method* and which we examined in our discussion of scientism in chapter one. This Enlightenment view distorts the more originary understanding of prejudice as the pre-judgments one has in going about dwelling in the world, replacing it instead with an understanding of prejudice as error.

Contrary to the Enlightenment view Gadamer asserts prejudice as the way in which, with no other alternative, we relate to the tradition and come to understanding. Prejudice is a necessity for thinking itself. Our understanding of and participating in

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[45] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 273.

history is embedded with prejudices. Gadamer states, highlighting the historicity at work in all communicative events,

> In fact history does not belong to us; we belong to it. Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live. The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life. *That is why the prejudices of the individual, far more than his judgments, constitute the historical reality of his being*.[46]

This passage from Gadamer is imperative, both for the history of philosophy and the project set forth here because he shifts the Enlightenment focus on subjectivity and self-awareness to that which conditions the possibility of self-awareness from the start. In this way, Gadamer's critique of the Enlightenment is more radical than the Enlightenment attempted to be as he continues its motivation rather than its method.[47] Prejudice becomes the ground upon which judgments—and consequently the self-examination the Enlightenment claims to privilege—rest. Moreover, these preliminary fore-conceptions or pre-judgments serve as a horizon for the interpreter and stand as the ground upon which the horizons of interpreter and text can fuse. For Gadamer, this fusion of horizons is the accomplishment of understanding.

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[46] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 278. Italics HGG.

[47] In a similar line of thought, drawing from Marx, see Ramsey Eric Ramsey and A. Raj Thiruvengadam's "What is Enlightened Freedom?: An Essay on What Kant Taught Us," in Ramsey's *The Long Path to Nearness* (Amherst, NY: Humanity Books, 1998).

Although the Enlightenment rightly critiques the abdication of reason, Gadamer finds the equating of tradition and illegitimate authority questionable at best, adding a critical edge to what could be misread as conservative,

> In tradition there is always an element of freedom and of history itself. Even the most genuine and pure tradition does not persist because of the inertia of what once existed. It needs to be affirmed, embraced, cultivated. It is, essentially, preservation…but preservation is an act of reason…preservation is as much a freely chosen action as are revolution and renewal.[48]

Preservation on Gadamer's account is an act of freedom, an act of cultivating the inheritance that one is. It is this idea I shall exploit in my return, recovery, and rehabilitation of the concept of hyperbole in the following chapter. Furthermore, the interrogation of one's prejudices or fore-meanings is, like the hermeneutic task itself, a questioning. Gadamer clarifies what is at stake in this understanding when he writes: "Reflection on a given pre-understanding brings before me something that otherwise happens *behind my back.*"[49] The investigation of one's prejudices, this force from behind one's back, brings into relief the ideological structures and the historical conditions that made possible one's pre-understanding. Thus, this force from behind one's own back is not always or only an ambush; it is, rather, a type of gift—a buoyancy that holds one within the world understandingly. Gadamer pushes this conceptualization of prejudice further in response to a question posed by Habermas on what it is that hermeneutics teaches us. Gadamer responds, "The thing hermeneutics teaches us is to see through the

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[48] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 282-283.
[49] Gadamer, "Rhetoric, Hermeneutics and Ideology-Critique," 329.

dogmatism of asserting an opposition and separation between the ongoing natural 'tradition' and *the reflective appropriation of it*."[50] Gadamer brings to the fore that there is no tradition over and against which we stand and appropriate as we choose in some final form. Rather, the tradition as understood through and within language, is always in the process of being appropriated. The tradition is not a natural phenomenon that can come to be distorted or purified, but rather that the tradition is as it is appropriated in various ways to be judged by the context and situation.

Language is the medium within which this hermeneutic experience of coming to terms with the tradition takes place. To be sure, Gadamer's conception of language or communication here is not a narrow one.[51] Language is not reducible to linguistic marks on a page, but rather linguisticality encompasses all our attempts at making meaning within the world; for Gadamer, like Heidegger, language extends beyond symbol-use. Gadamer explains the understanding of language we shall work with throughout this project,

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[50] Gadamer, "Rhetoric, Hermeneutics and Ideology-Critique," 321. [Italics my own].

[51] Along these lines, Gadamer tells us: "However, the very term 'language use' always implies things that look past the real nature of our linguistic experience of the world. It suggests that words are like something one has in one's pocket and when one uses them one just pulls them out of one's pocket, as if linguistic usage were at the whim of the user of language. But language is not dependent on this or that user. In reality, language usage shows us that ultimately the language refuses to be misused. For it is language itself that prescribes what will be linguistically acceptable. *This should not be taken to mean some kind of mythologizing of language; it means, rather, that the claim of language can never be reduced to what an individual subjectively intends. It belongs to the way of being of language that we and not just one of us but indeed all of us are the ones who are speaking*." [Italics my own.] Gadamer, "Language and Understanding," in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of Later Writings*. Edited by Richard Palmer (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 105.

> There is the language of the eyes, the language of the hands, pointing and naming, all this is language and confirms that language is constantly present in our transactions with one another. Words are always answers, even when they are questions…There is no doubt that language is not only a language of words but must also be seen as a form of communication. That means that there is a broader concept of language as well as the narrower one. In the broader sense, language includes all communication, not only speaking but also all gestures that come into play in the linguistic relations among humans.[52]

Understanding a gesture is as much an issue of language as understanding Shakespeare. "Language is what is constantly building up and bearing within itself [the] commonality of world-orientation," as Gadamer writes.[53] Language is, as we saw with Heidegger too, our shared being-together-in-the-world.

It is against this backdrop of the linguisticality of the hermeneutic experience that we receive Gadamer's most famous lines in *Truth and Method*: "Being that can be understood is language."[54] These lines have puzzled scholars since they were written, inciting various debates about the profundity of the statement. In German it reads: "*Sein, das verstanden warden kann, ist Sprache*." Gianni Vattimo has made much of the perplexity the statement by focusing on the inclusion of the commas. These two commas, which are retained in German to preserve a grammatical structure, are omitted in the English and Italian translations. Vattimo argues that without the commas it easily slips

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[52] Gadamer, "The Boundaries of Language," in Lawrence K. Schmidt (Ed.), *Language and Linguisticality in Gadamer's Hermeneutics* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2000), 9.
[53] Gadamer, "Language and Understanding," 96.
[54] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 470.

into an equivalence between being and language. Gadamer himself does not advocate this position and outright denies this as the intention of his claim stating,

> I once formulated this idea [the all-encompassing nature of the hermeneutic experience] by saying that being that can be understood is language. This is certainly not a metaphysical assertion. Instead, it describes, from the medium of understanding, the unrestricted scope possessed by the hermeneutical perspective.[55]

What Gadamer seems to be saying is that insofar as being is able to be understood, it is understood through the medium of language. This appears to be confirmed in his later claim,

> When I wrote the sentence "Being which can be understood is language," I implied that what is can never be completely understood. And this follows insofar as everything that goes under the name of language always refers beyond that which achieves the status of a proposition. What is to be understood is what comes into language, but of course it is always what is taken as something, taken as true. This is the hermeneutical dimension in which Being "manifests itself."[56]

When something comes into language this does not mean, for Gadamer, that it acquires some sort of secondary being (a being-linguistic, if you will), but rather that "what something presents itself as belongs to its own being."[57] Nevertheless, in Gadamer the

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[55] Gadamer, "Aesthetics and Hermeneutics," in *Philosophical Hermeneutics*, ed. David E. Linge (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1977), 103.
[56] Gadamer, "Text and Interpretation," in *Dialogue and Deconstruction: The Gadamer-Derrida Encounter*, eds. Diane P. Michelfelder and Richard E. Palmer (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989), 25.
[57] Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 470.

relationship between being and communication is much more highly entwined than it was for both the early Heidegger and Jaspers. Because of this I shall follow Gadamer on this score and retain this understanding as a knowing prejudice in the philosophy of communication I articulate throughout.

3.5 A Circle Has Many Turns

> Months and days are the wayfarers of a hundred generations, the years too, going and coming, are wanderers. For those who drift life away on a boat, for those who meet age leading a horse by the mouth, each day is a journey, the journey itself home.
>
> Matsuo Basho, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*

Let us return now to Heidegger as promised. Following *Being and Time* and the works published shortly thereafter, Heidegger shifts his understanding of language as a constitutive structure of Dasein to language as the space wherein being is able to make an appearance. This *Kehre* or turn in Heidegger's thought, according to Schrag, moves from the meaning of being to the truth of being. Despite taking a different approach, the central issue remains an understanding of being with regard to language. Rather than examine the entirety of Heidegger's later work, for this project there are three salient aspects we must explore: (1) Heidegger's claim that "language is the house of Being"; (2) the relationship between language and technology and; (3) his turn to poetry as the milieu for philosophic thought.

This turn in Heidegger's thought is generally marked by his publication of the "Letter on Humanism" in 1947. Written in response to inquiries regarding his relationship with humanism and existentialism, Heidegger's letter can be read as an indirect response to Jean-Paul Sartre's essay "Existentialism as a Humanism" wherein

Sartre sets forth the fundamental tenant of existentialism that existence precedes essence. Sartre was unhappy this piece drew so much attention as it likely caused more confusion than clarification; nevertheless, the essay made way for Heidegger's new conceptualization of language. We can understand Sartre's claim roughly as the assertion that there is no fundamental human nature (whether biologically or theologically determined) that undergirds our existence, but rather human beings are an open and ongoing project wherein we must determine ourselves. We must act because we are free and we are free because we can act. Furthermore, for Sartre this reversal of the dominant metaphysical presupposition that there is an underlying human nature, forms a kind of humanism because it finally, from his perspective, exalts the dignity of human beings as ones who are fundamentally free.

Heidegger confounds this position and begins his letter by raising the question of the meaning of action. Action has predominantly been philosophically understood through the lens of causality. That is, human beings are acting agents when they have the power to cause an effect. Furthermore, we evaluate action in terms of utility—namely, how an action can achieve a particular end or purpose. The problem with this understanding for Heidegger is that it is too quick and cursory and quite caught up in the instrumentalization of thought (about which more shortly). Heidegger seeks to deepen the understanding of action so as to deepen the understanding of human being and thus move beyond humanism toward something deeper still and moves me closer to the type of understanding requisite for this project.

He does so by turning to what is often thought to be the counterpart or opposite of action: thinking. For Heidegger, thinking is not subservient to acting—it is not something

we do so that we might then act—but thinking is action in its most illustrious form as it has the most intimate connection with truth. Heidegger illustrates this in claiming, "Thinking accomplishes the relation of Being to the essence of man."[58] In other words, it is through thinking that being itself is brought into a relationship with human beings. Thinking, for Heidegger, is always the thinking of being as it both belongs to being and listens to it. Following this explication of action, Heidegger offers what is arguably the most important passage of the essay: "Language is the house of Being."[59] How are we to understand such a sentence, one that rivals Gadamer's "Being that can be understood is language" not only in difficulty but in importance as well? Heidegger offers us this interpretation of this ambiguous and poetic phrase,

> Language is not the utterance of an organism; nor is it the expression of a living thing. Never can it ever be thought in an essentially correct way in terms of its symbolic character, perhaps not even in terms of the character of signification. Language is the clearing-concealing advent of Being itself.[60]

By language Heidegger does not (and never has) mean only those who work with words, whether written or spoken, though this is certainly part of language. Language, and for this we ought to be grateful, is greater than this. Language is the space wherein meaning makes its entry into the world; it is the disclosure (i.e., truth) of being itself. We can see clear parallels here to Gadamer's claim that "Being that can be understood is language."

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[58] Martin Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism" in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1993), 217.
[59] Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," 217.
[60] Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," 230.

This is why the scope of language must be broadened to not only include words but equally gesture, movement, and artistic marks. Each of these open up sites of disclosure.

A more difficult problem, perhaps, is determining what a house might mean in this instance. For this we need to do a bit of interpretive work. Robert Pogue Harrison in his book *The Dominion of the Dead* devotes an entire chapter to this question. I share his thoughts here to demonstrate what is at stake and what is made possible for thinking if we have the courage to think communication otherwise than its everyday sense. Harrison turns not to architects or city planners to address this issue, but poets and philosophers, in particular Henry David Thoreau and Rainer Maria Rilke. Although the architect and the planner know how to build a home, it is the poet and the philosopher who ask what it means to dwell in one. What do houses do? What does a house provide? A house foremost provides an enclosure or shelter. As Harrison notes, the first houses were, anthropologically, houses for the dead—a tomb or grave. We made a lasting place for others before we turned to permanence for ourselves. Furthermore, within ancient Greek and Roman houses, there was often an altar upon which the sacred fires of ancestors burned, which later became the ground for our understanding of the hearth. We might recall Heraclitus warming himself at his stove, telling visitors that "even here too the gods are present." Indeed, both Heidegger and Harrison make much of this Heraclitean insight. A house, then, bridges the living with the dead. Within the walls of a house or home we are protected from the elements and are able to retain our vital heat. We are sheltered, at least momentarily, from the weather, from that which lies beyond our control. Furthermore, houses form a border, where inside and outside meet at its walls and where one stands before a frontier.

Within houses we put things in their place, but houses too are a place of their own, a place for ourselves. They provide us with an orientation. Houses are an enclosure with an opening. The opening, of course, is key, as it prevents the house from becoming a prison. Deeper, though, a house places us at the opening extending beyond ourselves and orients us to the outside and to a world always in excess of ourselves. Let us not forget, too, that houses can be haunted. That is to say, that which is present in a house need not correspond to the number of living inhabitants—houses are filled with the memories of those no longer there as well as the expectation of others yet to arrive.

Let us hear again Heidegger's claim: Language is the house of being. Language gives us a lasting place wherein we can dwell, wherein we can make meaning of this human situation caught between life and death, the mundane and the cosmic. Language bridges time and culture and grants us the ability to oscillate between these poles. Harrison writes eloquently on this matter:

> Works of literature, then, are more than enduring tablets where an author's words survive his or her demise. They are the gifts of human worlds, cosmic in nature, that hold their place in time so that the living and the unborn may inhabit them at will, make themselves at home in their articulate humanity—all thanks to the ultimate gift of the earth, which renders their testaments possible.[61]

Language, as the sedimentation of voices past is haunted most of all. All speaking is a communing with ghosts (the communication of those no longer with us) as it is their words we must say anew and make our own. But most importantly, however, language is

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[61] Robert Pogue Harrison, *The Dominion of the Dead* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 15.

what brings us to an opening, a precipice before ourselves wherein we cultivate our world with others.

For Heidegger, and I agree with him here, everything is jeopardized when we misunderstand the essence of language. This misunderstanding is made all the easier by the development of modern technology, the technology made possible by an objectivistic metaphysics. Heidegger's critique of technology can be found in moments throughout his work, but it is most pronounced in "The Question Concerning Technology," "The Age of the World-Picture," and the Bremen lectures. Throughout these texts, Heidegger offers a rather biting critique of modern science and machine technology. In "The Question Concerning Technology" Heidegger seeks, on his account, to prepare a free relationship to technology via a thorough understanding of technology and its essence. Technology and the essence of technology are not reducible to each other and this tendency to reduction is itself constitutive of our poor relation to technology. For Heidegger the essence of technology is a "way of revealing the world."[62] Said otherwise, the essence of technology is a way through which being is disclosed.

To arrive at this claim he reinterprets Aristotelian metaphysics, in particular the doctrine of the four causes—as causality is linked to instrumentality, which is a pervasive and correct, though not sufficient, understanding of technology. The sheet anchor of the essay is the distinction between two modes of revealing: bringing-forth and challenging-forth. Heidegger focuses on the latter as it most clearly exposes the essence of technology.

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[62] Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, trans. William Lovitt (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 12.

Heidegger's finest example of this distinction is his exposition on the Rhine River. Heidegger's insights disclose so much essential to my project they must be cited at length,

> In the context of the interlocking processes pertaining to the orderly disposition of electrical energy, even the Rhine itself appears as something at our command. The hydroelectric plant is not built into the Rhine River as was the old wooden bridge that joined bank with bank for hundreds of years. Rather the river is dammed up into the power plant. What the river is now, namely a water power supplier, derives from out of the essence of the power station. In order that we may even remotely consider the monstrousness that reigns here, let us ponder for a moment the contrast that speaks out of the two titles, "The Rhine" as dammed up into the *power* works, and "The Rhine" as uttered out of the *art* work, in Hölderlin's hymn by that name. But, it will be replied, the Rhine is still a river in the landscape, is it not? Perhaps. But how? In no other way than as an object on call for inspection by a tour group ordered there by the vacation industry.[63]

Here challenging-forth reveals something as standing-reserve and as something stockpiled for use. Importantly, for Heidegger humans do not challenge-forth the world out of an act of will. Rather, the challenging "gathers man into ordering […] concentrates man upon ordering the real as standing-reserve."[64] This challenging of human beings is *Gestell* (enframing). Recalling the language of *Being and Time*, Dasein is the there where the challenging-forth occurs, but Dasein is not the cause of the challenging. The essence of technology lies within this enframing. Further, *Gestell* and thus the essence of

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[63] Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," 16. Italics MH.
[64] Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," 19.

technology, covers itself over and as a result appears as the *only way* of revealing/being. Enframing sends humans on the way, or destines them, to reveal everything as standing-reserve. We encountered this earlier in our discussion of aperture. *Gestell* provides an aperture of being as it is expressed in a technologically contoured modernity. The way in which being is disclosed, because of the essence of technology and its enframing, is pre-figured in advance and appears as natural. In other words, the aperture itself is not brought into relief and that image of being which shines forth through it is shaped without our acknowledgement. The task then, as we have been saying, is to twist-a-way from within this aperture.

Language, too, is caught up in *Gestell*. In an often overlooked lecture "Traditional Language and Technological Language" Heidegger understands language to be under attack by precisely the information theories of language which held sway in the early to mid-twentieth century. He writes,

> If in the spirit of the reign of all-determining technology one holds information to be the highest form of language because of its clarity, and the security and speed in the exchange of reports and assignments, then the result of this is also the corresponding conception of the human's being and of human life.[65]

Technological understandings of language, as the transmission of signals within feedback loops reduce human beings, on Heidegger's account, back into the Cartesian *cogito* of objectivist metaphysics. Language brings the world into appearance; at issue is whether

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[65] Martin Heidegger, "Traditional Language and Technological Language," *Journal of Philosophical Research 23* (1998), 141.

we can allow things into presence without marking them merely as standing-reserve or objects of utility. Heidegger puts it this way in "Building Dwelling Thinking,"

> It is language that tells us the essential nature of a thing, provided that we respect language's own nature. In the meantime, to be sure, there rages around the earth an unbridled yet clever talking, writing, and broadcasting of spoken words. Man acts as though he were the shaper and master of language, while in fact language remains the master of man. Perhaps it is before all else man's subversion of this relation of dominance that drives his nature into alienation.[66]

Language says as showing; it discloses phenomena as meaningfully within the world. Yet when we misunderstand this relationship we find ourselves in peril; indeed, Heidegger sees our misunderstanding of language to be more threatening than the development of atomic weapons.

Against the ever-growing challenge of technological language, Heidegger turns in the end to poetry and poetical thinking as the saving power of language and of thought. For Heidegger, following Hölderlin, poetry is the highest form of language and the greatest expression of thinking. Poetry is the language that illuminates the essence of human being. For Heidegger the ground upon which we dwell, upon which we are, is poetic. He states, "Poetry does not fly above and surmount the earth in order to escape it and hover over it. Poetry is what first brings man onto the earth, making him belong to it, and thus brings him into dwelling."[67] Poetry, in bringing mortals to their dwelling, brings

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[66] Martin Heidegger, "Building Dwelling Thinking" in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstader (New York: Harper and Row, 2001), 144.
[67] Martin Heidegger, "...Poetically Man Dwells..." in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstader (New York: Harper and Row, 2001), 216.

them to the possibilities of themselves. It brings them to the realization that they are as dwelling, as being-in-the-world. This turn to poetry and dwelling problematizes the grammar of being and moves Heidegger toward, on Schrag's account, the erasure of being. Here Heidegger is seemingly concerned with language itself and the way in which human beings are caught up in the play of language. It makes good sense, then, when Schrag articulates the relation of saying to language this way,

> Saying is not a linguistic phenomenon; neither is it restricted to the articulation of Dasein's existential constitution (Heidegger I); nor does it achieve its fulfillment as the 'house of Being' (Heidegger II). Saying is a poetic comportment in the sojourn of mortals.[68]

We can see this in the inversion Heidegger gives between human beings and language. Human beings do not speak language. On the contrary,

> Man first speaks when, and only when, he responds to language by listening to its appeal. Among all the appeals that we human beings, on our part, may help to be voiced, language is the highest and everywhere the first…The responding in which man authentically listens to the appeal of language is that which speaks in the element of poetry.[69]

This of course runs contrary to our everyday understanding of communication which holds that we are the ones who speak words, words which we have selected and shaped. Indeed, some might think such a claim is a bit spooky. He offers some clarification in *What is Called Thinking?*:

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[68] Schrag, "The Three Heideggers," 172.
[69] Heidegger, "...Poetically Man Dwells...," 214.

> It is not we who play with words, but the nature of language plays with us, not only in this case, not only now, but long since and always. For language plays with our speech—it likes to let our speech drift away into the more obvious meanings of words. It is as though man had to make an effort to live properly with language. It is as though such a dwelling were especially prone to succumb to the danger of commonness.[70]

Poetic language brings us to this understanding of language and allows us to dwell there. Moreover, poetic language exposes human being to the difficulty of living properly within language, that is, the difficulty of genuinely saying something and not merely perpetuating the repetition of the same. It is this, and not his participation in National Socialism, that we might properly call the political moment in Heidegger's work. Our dwelling within language is itself political because it is through this dwelling that we encounter others in their ethical relationship to us.

It is in poetry, too, that Heidegger makes room for a relationship with divinity. To be sure, Heidegger's divine looks little like the divine of any historical religion. The divine is not a supreme being. Rather, divinity is simply that which is beyond, in an ontological rather than ontic sense. We might say, to borrow from Levinas, that the divine is otherwise than being. Nevertheless, it is poetry that brings us into relation with divinity. In "…Poetically Man Dwells…" poetry is a measuring; "to write poetry is measure-taking, in the strict sense of the word, by which man first receives the measure

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[70] Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking?*, 118-119.

for the breadth of his being."[71] This measure is not a doing, at least not in the sense of a challenging of the world, but a letting-be.

In returning to Heidegger once more, we find an altered relationship to being, one that is concerned less with the constitutive features of Dasein and more with the letting-be of being through poetical thinking and a free relationship with technology, although it is difficult, if not impossible, to imagine him getting here without the genius of *Being and Time*. For our concerns in this project, we find a less systematic understanding of language and the call of poetry to aid our understanding of being. This turn makes further room for rhetorically oriented approaches to the issue of being, as we shall see in the following chapter.

Throughout this chapter we have examined various challenges to understanding communication functionally as information exchange. Such an understanding, although undoubtedly useful and efficient at times, eclipses other possibilities for our communicative praxis. What the linguistic turn in phenomenology and philosophical hermeneutics demonstrated was that communication itself was much more fundamental we had previously thought. With the early work of Heidegger we see language as a constitutive feature of human being-in-the-world; with Jaspers we find communication at the heart of self-being and communion with others; with Gadamer language illuminates being and grounds our relationships with others; and finally with Heidegger's late works communication takes on a strange role of its own in the disclosure of being. What each thinker highlights in his own way is that in order to continue the philosophic project of

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[71] Heidegger, "...Poetically Man Dwells...," 219.

ontology we will not only encounter communication, but we must hold it to be central to the question of being.

Moreover, it is our task here to turn these insights into the phenomenon of communication toward questions of ethics and politics. Neither Jaspers nor Gadamer were particularly politically active, although they were both adamantly against despotism. Heidegger's politics, as we well know, were the biggest failure of his life's work. Nevertheless, it is my position here that any approach to ethics and politics requires that we work through the insights of philosophical hermeneutics as it is here where we are able to approach the other as both singular and representative, as part of a larger community and at the same time irreducibly unique. Moreover, philosophical hermeneutics, through its twisting-a-way through the tradition, grants us the possibility of shifting grounds of judgment even if the metaphysical certainty we desire is no longer available. In other words, hermeneutics offers us the practical attitude, the necessary *phronesis*, through which we are able to respond to shifting global circumstances.

With this at hand, the work we have done in this chapter exploring the ground of philosophical hermeneutics and alternative approaches to communication beyond information exchange has provided us with a nexus of terms to which we will have recourse in thinking about testimony: disclosure, opening, excess, inexhaustible, vastness, unbounded, irreducible. In the following chapter we shall focus on the hyperbolic at at work in communication. It is this hyperbolic condition, I will argue, that most clearly gives shape to testimony.

CHAPTER 4. SPEAKING OF SERIOUS THINGS: THINKING COMMUNICATION HYPERBOLICALLY

Even the slightest testimony concerning the most plausible, ordinary or everyday thing cannot do otherwise: it still must appeal to faith as would a miracle.
Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge"

4.1 Reading Between the Lines

To hyperbolize is to tell and not to tell enormous truths in one eloquent breath.
Christopher Johnson, *Hyperboles*

In *Hermeneutic Communism* Gianni Vattimo and Santiago Zabala draw a direct link between hermeneutics and metaphysics: "Hermeneutics did not begin because of a theoretical discovery; it is an interpretive response to the end of metaphysics."[1] Their claim echoes Gadamer's concern that hermeneutics must move beyond the attempt to find the original meaning of a text to a sophisticated understanding of the very way in which our dwelling together in the world is interpretive. For Vattimo and Zabala, this is a necessary response to the end of metaphysics; that is, in the wake of the death of God we find a plentitude of perspectives and interpretations. With Nietzsche we discover that there are no facts, only interpretations; the words we use have no privileged access to the reality we face. There is no correspondence between language and a true nature simply in

[1] Gianni Vattimo and Santiago Zabala, *Hermeneutic Communism: From Heidegger to Marx* (Columbia: Columbia University Press, 2011), 96.

need of uncovering. Instead, we are ensconced within the contingencies of history and culture. This is the lesson of postmodernity, "that each experience of truth is an experience of interpretation is almost a truism in today's culture."[1] This is the case, of course, only to a point, as we witness simultaneously the unbridled fanaticism of contemporary fundamentalism that resists this hermeneutic lesson. Nevertheless, the outcome of the end of metaphysics is the ubiquity of hermeneutics and the rise of various conflicts of interpretation this end entails. However, Vattimo in *Beyond Interpretation* believes this understanding needs to be pushed further, beyond the understanding that hermeneutics is merely "the metatheory of the play of interpretations." Hermeneutics itself must undergo a comprehension of its own historicity so as to avoid being merely "a purely relativistic philosophy of cultural multiplicity."[2] This means that hermeneutics must recognize itself as a nihilistic vocation. Nihilism is the provenance or origin of hermeneutics. Said differently, hermeneutics is the necessary outcome of nihilism. Here Vattimo advances Heidegger's later position on language and offers to our understanding of communication a revolutionary impulse,

> If one can speak of Being (and one must, in order not to fall unwittingly back into objectivistic metaphysics), it must be sought at the level of those inherited openings (Heidegger also says: in language, which is the house of Being), within which Dasein, man, is always already thrown as into its provenance.[3]

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[1] Gianni Vattimo, *Beyond Interpretation: The Meaning of Hermeneutics for Philosophy* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 5.
[2] Vattimo, *Beyond Interpretation*, 9.
[3] Vattimo, *Beyond Interpretation*, 14.

The meaning of hermeneutics recognizes that the dissolution of objectivistic metaphysics is not an error or a mistake, not something that results from some sort of ineptitude, but is itself the event of Being. If this is the case, then Vattimo sees a tendency to weakening "which is, to be sure, only such on the basis of the metaphysical category of presence, of fullness" within Being itself. With this, Vattimo makes the radical claim: "until now philosophers have seen fit to describe the world, now the moment has arrived to interpret it."[4] Obviously playing on Marx's Eleventh Thesis of the *Theses on Feuerbach* (to wit: "philosophers have only interpreted the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to change it"), Vattimo brings into relief the transformative force of interpretation. Interpretation and social change are not separate endeavors, but are instead mutual projects each of which is intertwined with the other. Such is the task of what we have been calling twisting-a-way.

This leaves the task of philosophy in a curious position, but one that we should be prepared to take up. Philosophy is no longer a quest for certainties and absolute foundations, rather it is the place for historical narrative and the unmasking of absolute, ultimate truths—the weakening of thought with which Vattimo and his colleagues are concerned. In this regard, Vattimo allows us to see an alliance between philosophy and more socio-politically oriented projects. He notes in particular the way in which twentieth century philosophy took the form of "sociological impressionism" (think, for example, of the work of Adorno, Benjamin, and Bloch).[5] In the refusal of objectivist metaphysics, and the turn to analyzing the rationalization of society through technological and scientific

[4] Vattimo, *Beyond Interpretation*, 14.
[5] Vattimo, *Nihilism and Emancipation*, 4.

means, philosophy took up a generalized critique of industrialization and the consequences this has for social life. To borrow from Adorno, philosophy became concerned with the total administration of everything that is. With this understanding of how one practices philosophy, it is of little surprise then that Vattimo was elected to the European Parliament in 1999, is a prominent social democratic politician, writes newspaper columns, and generally participates in the political concerns of his age. Equally, it should not be surprising to find philosophers more generally to hold deeply committed political concerns. What Vattimo discloses for this project is that the task of philosophy is to interpret Being as it can be understood for our times; that is, to witness the event of Being. For Vattimo, this means coming to terms with technology. Following Heidegger, metaphysics is the basis of the modern techno-scientific understanding of being, but it is also the space within which the very fragmentation of the significance of existence takes place. In other words, the basis for our understanding is simultaneously the conditions for its undoing. Moving beyond Heidegger's critique of mechanical technologies in works such as "The Question Concerning Technology" and "The Age of the World-Picture," Vattimo turns his attention information and communication technologies. Although I find this project necessary, it is not one I wish to take up here. Rather, I believe it is of importance to examine not only our technological heritage, but equally the literary and rhetorical tradition to which we have access and which constantly shapes our understanding of dwelling in the world. In other words, we must add to Vattimo's sociological impressionism a rhetorical nuance at which he hints throughout his work, particularly in his writings about being a professor of philosophy, but does not take up directly. Here we can take with us a watchword: "Hermeneutics is a way of

looking at Being as an inheritance that is never considered as ultimate data."[6] In other words, our inheritance—the event of being to which we are a *witness*—is irreducible and expansive. It provides not the final word on any matter but the conditions necessary to say the first. Furthermore, it is this inheritance, this repertoire of responses to being in the world, that offers some safeguarding against relativism in its unbridled form. Our inheritance is something to which we have recourse, which has the solidity not of something absolute, but of something historical, and provides buoyancy in the sea of meanings wherein we find ourselves. Hermeneutics offers us the lesson that our inheritance is inexhaustible to the degree we are willing to approach it questioningly. We might ask in a manner parallel and complimentary to Vattimo's concern with technology, what resources in our rhetorical history, the inheritance that we ourselves are, do we have to assist us in understanding being in a manner fitting to our times? And, of equal importance, how might this understanding address issues of political and social concern?

4.2 Figuring Speech

> We can always escape toward an "elsewhere," but this elsewhere is still somewhere, in the heart of our human condition. We never escape from that human condition, and we have no way to envision it from the outside in order to judge it. It alone makes language possible.
>
> Simone de Beauvoir, *Pyrrhus and Cineas*

In his deftly written handbook of rhetorical tropes and figures of speech, the late Arthur Quinn introduces his readers to the myriad possibilities of turning a phrase with the following admonition: "Writing is not like chemical engineering. We shouldn't learn the figures of speech the way we learn the periodic table of elements. We shouldn't

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[6] Vattimo and Zabala, *Hermeneutic Communism*, 93.

because we are learning not about hypothetical structures in things, but about real potentialities within our language, within ourselves."[7] In other words, figures of speech are not concepts to be collected and stored, ready to be inserted into writing and speech when needed, as one might select a spice from the spice rack now and then to add greater flavor to a dish when the recipe calls for it. Figures of speech at their core are neither accouterments nor extravagances, despite the fact that they are all too often approached with such purpose in mind. On the contrary, when we do work with words we simultaneously do work upon ourselves. Figures of speech are as much an issue of existence as they are of language.

As I have argued throughout, linguistic and communicative practices are inextricably linked to shaping both individual and shared human experience. Indeed, if we are to take Aristotle at his word with his summation of human beings as *zoon logon echon*, often merely translated as "the animal who has reason (language)," as the defining characteristic of human beings then we must make sense of the relationship between language and human being in the world.[8] To understand Aristotle's claim in a more fundamental manner is to understand that living for human beings is to be caught up in the whirlwind of language—of speaking and listening—in the drive toward communication, which is to say, toward the disclosure of a shared world within which we have a multiplicity of intentions and purposes that must be negotiated in common. The life of human beings is a life suffused with speech and the presence of others. Consequently, I believe it is paramount to turn our attention to particular figures of

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[7] Arthur Quinn, *Figures of Speech* (Davis, CA: Hermagoras Press, 1993), 2.
[8] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. J.A.K. Thomson (New York: Penguin, 1953), 1098a.

speech so as to see what they might uncover about experience generally. That is to say, following the philosophical and hermeneutical work of Chapter Three, can a rhetorical figure itself be an aperture of being?

Although I believe any rhetorical figure would give insights into the workings of language, and thus consequently of being, not just any figure here will do. Given this contemporary age of extremes, extremes of both abundance and lack on a global scale, I suggest we turn our eye toward that rhetorical figure of excess: hyperbole. In the main, within everyday use, hyperbole appears to function with ill repute. Often the term conjures up claims such as "I'm so hungry I could eat a horse," over mere discomfort or "It's freezing in here!" when the temperature is merely chilly. Or perhaps one thinks of the mainstream media's incessant hyperbolizing and sensationalism for the sake of profit. Certainly these exaggerations are illustrative of hyperbole, but can we allow hyperbole to do more noble work? That is, might hyperbole have a positive function in our discourse, a function that is disclosive rather than ideologically suspect. Furthermore, the approaches to communication we explored by way of Heidegger, Jaspers, and Gadamer all made overtures to the hyperbolic, but they do not explicitly theorize the hyperbolic. Such then is our task here, to make visible the hyperbolic at work in these approaches to communication and link it to testimony which I will argue is the ontological condition of communication that embraces this hyperbolic force.

From the Greek ὕπερβολή, *hyperballein* ("to throw beyond"), or its Latin cognate *superiectio*, hyperbole reaches beyond the ordinary into the extraordinary, that which lies outside our everyday experience. Hyperbole exists at the limit, both the limits of discourse and the limits of understanding. Hyperbole exploits the extraordinary so as to

illuminate the everyday and vice versa. Hyperbole helps to mark the limits of objective knowledge and subjective experience. More than mere exaggeration or amplification (although often reduced to this understanding) hyperbole causes problems for those who attempt to understand the figurative literally. For now, though, we are getting ahead of ourselves, beginning in a space beyond the proper beginning—beginning already within a hyperbolic spirit so to speak.

Let us work not yet forward and beyond as the hyperbolic urges us to do, but backward into a brief history of hyperbole. I will not offer here a comprehensive history, but only a modest account of hyperbole's early days in classical antiquity before turning our sights to more contemporary issues.[9] As a figure of speech hyperbole has received rich and varied treatment in the rhetorical tradition ranging from admiration to disgust. For some, hyperbole is no more than mere exaggeration and often of a grotesque form at best. Aristotle, with his emphasis on moderation and propriety—worked out most masterfully in his *Nicomachean Ethics* but equally evident in his analysis of rhetoric—is hesitant to praise hyperbole. Indeed, on his account hyperbole is a rhetorical trope fueled by primarily by emotion rather than reason; he states "Hyperboles are adolescent, for they

[9] Christopher Johnson gives the most comprehensive and insightful historical account of hyperbole through Baroque literature that I have found. See *Hyperboles: The Rhetoric of Excess in Baroque Literature and Thought* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010). Additional, but less comprehensive, histories can be found in Kenneth Holmqvist and Jaroslaw Pluciennik, *Infinity in Language: Conceptualization of the Experience of the Sublime* (New Castle upon Tyne, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008) and Stephen H. Webb's *Re-Figuring Theology: The Rhetoric of Karl Barth* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1991). See also Joshua Ritter, "Recovering Hyperbole: Rethinking the Limits of Rhetoric for an Age of Excess," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 45(2012): 406-428

exhibit vehemence. Therefore those in anger, mostly speak them…"[10] As it is the young who tend to over-do things, to act excessively, hyperbole is best reserved to that specific class of individuals and to be avoided by mature adults.

Nevertheless, hyperbole finds its most sustained moment in Aristotle's project within his discussion of metaphor in Book 3 of the *Rhetoric*. He writes of metaphor, "metaphors should be transferred from things that are related but not obviously so, as in philosophy, too, it is characteristic of a well-directed mind to observe the likeness even in things very different."[11] In this respect, metaphor has a knowledge producing function as it brings together the familiar with the unfamiliar so as to make something understandable. One must take care in doing so, however, as Aristotle claims the speaker must continually maintain a believable ethos, which hyperbole risks shattering. Thus hyperbole, itself a figure which eschews propriety, must be used in moderation. It is against this backdrop that his claim of hyperbole's adolescence makes sense—its exaggerated form is fitting only when the mood calls for it. The intensity of the rhetorical situation is the only justification for employing hyperbolic means. Beyond this, for Aristotle at least, hyperbole is indecorous.

Longinus in his discussion of the sublime makes further space for hyperbole than does Aristotle. The hyperbolic and the sublime are not coincident, but hyperbole plays a role in making the sublime manifest. Indeed, it is only in this reaching and pointing toward the sublime that hyperbole finds its legitimate place, otherwise as with Aristotle, hyperbole falls prey to excess. Longinus writes of the hyperbolist who, in his shooting-

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[10] Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, trans. George A. Kennedy (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1413b.
[11] Aristotle, *On Rhetoric*, 1412a.

beyond the everyday misses the sublime, and may fall "into unaccountable puerility through his desire to amplify everything."[12] Although granting further power to hyperbole with respect to the sublime, Longinus likewise holds that excess is to be avoided.

Within classical theories of rhetoric, hyperbole finds its greatest and most balanced expression in Quintilian's *Institutio Oratoria*. A veritable textbook on rhetorical style and practice—both written and spoken—the *Institutio* had profound consequence for the rebirth of classical rhetoric in the late Renaissance. Quintilian defends rhetoric as the practical art of persuasion, a practice concerned more with everyday ethics than metaphysics, citizenship over ideal situations of justice. Following the traditional five-part division of rhetoric into invention, arrangement, style, delivery, and memory Quintilian takes up the issue of hyperbole in his discussion of style, what Quintilian himself declares "the most difficult part of the whole work."[13] Style marks the difference between the sufficient orator and the great. Although still hesitant, Quintilian makes greater room for transgressing the rules of decorum when the subject matter or rhetorical situation demands it. Christopher D. Johnson in his discussion of Quintilian's account of hyperbole speaks of how hyperbole is "bolder" than other tropes (among which metaphor is the most common) and often "functions as a catachrestic vehicle for the most desperate, unspeakable emotions and thoughts."[14] Catachresis is the figure of providing a name for something that lacks one (e.g., "the leg of a chair" instead of "the part of the chair that

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[12] Longinus, *On the Sublime*, trans. W. H. Fyfe (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 38.2.
[13] Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria*, 5 vols., ed. and trans., Donald A. Russell (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 8.13.
[14] Johnson, *Hyperboles*, 35-36.

allows it to sustain weight"). In other words, catachresis borrows from one semantic field to describe something in an altogether category that otherwise lacks a term. Hyperbole takes on this form and as such is to be distinguished from mimetic truth, taking on what Johnson argues is a looser form of truth.[15] The *Bible* offers a rich array of loose truths. For example, in Mark 10:25 we read, "It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." Obviously we are not discussing camels and needles, but the hyperbolic image points toward the existential reality of the kingdom of God being reserved only for those who are worthy and who uphold charity beyond riches. Hyperbole, understood in terms of catachresis, provides a way to say something about that which cannot be said. It is an attempt, when no standard is available, to raise everyday language toward the extraordinary.

Quintilian distinguishes five types of hyperbole: hyperbole by simile, comparison, and metaphor which are tropological forms of hyperbole, and hyperbole through the exaggeration of facts and by "certain signs" which serve more as figures of thought.[16] Moreover, often hyperbole takes on a chain-reaction effect wherein hyperboles build upon each other, each out-doing the other so as to move the audience to a more transcendent or grotesque position. With respect to Quintilian, Johnson summarizes, "There are two principle justifications for hyperbole. First, the speaker is moved in some extraordinary manner. Second, some incredible subject calls for expression. Both

[15] Johnson, *Hyperboles*, 39.
[16] Johnson, *Hyperboles*, 42.

psychological (interior) and phenomenological (exterior) motives depend on the existence of an outrageous or extraordinary *res*."[17] Indeed, as Quintilian claims,

> Hyperbole only has positive value when the thing about which we have to speak transcends the ordinary limits of nature. We are then allowed to amplify, because the real size of the thing cannot be expressed, and it is better to go too far than not to go far enough.[18]

That is to say, hyperbole functions at the limit of everyday understanding in an effort to make sensible that which is unintelligible. Hyperbole functions as a figure of transcendence but, as we shall show, not merely an extra-worldly transcendence, but equally a transcendence within immanence, that is, the transcendence at the core of being in the world and of language.

Hyperbole continues to receive both accolade and criticism throughout the history of rhetorical criticism, but here we must change terrain to the domain of philosophy. This change need not be abrupt; indeed, as Calvin O. Schrag makes clear in "Rhetoric Resituated at the End of Philosophy," philosophy and rhetoric were born of the same ground and are today making a remarkable homecoming to their shared roots.[19] In that sense, we are not leaving rhetorical theory behind so much as carrying its lesson with us forward. I will argue throughout the remainder of this chapter that hyperbole ceases to be a figure of speech performing a specific function and transforms into a description of our ontological condition.

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[17] Johnson, *Hyperboles*, 44.
[18] Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria,* 8.7.75-76.
[19] Calvin O. Schrag, "Rhetoric Resituated at the End of Philosophy," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 85(1985), 164-174.

In *Dis-Enclosures*, Jean-Luc Nancy investigates the relationship between Christianity or the religious spirit and rationality. In particular, he attempts to dis-enclose or raise the barrier of the closing of metaphysics we found earlier in Nietzsche and Heidegger. For Nancy, Christianity "designates nothing other, essentially (that is to say simply, infinitely simply: through an inaccessible simplicity), than the demand to open in this world and alterity or an unconditional alienation."[20] That opening which Christianity calls into being is the other of the world rather than the world-beyond-worlds the Kingdom of Christ more often brings to mind. With Christianity the world becomes opened "to an inaccessible alterity." This inaccessible alterity necessarily shapes the world within which we dwell.

Nancy rephrases this claim by arguing that alongside *logos* (i.e., reason or language) the *alogon* is always present. He states,

> The *alogon* can be understood as the extreme, excessive, and necessary dimension of the *logos*; from the moment we speak of serious things (death, the world, being-together, being-oneself, the truth), it has never seriously been a question of anything other than this dimension. It is the *alogon* that reason introduced with itself.[21]

The force of hyperbole is this *alogon* which is always alongside reason. Hyperbole is the extreme that is always hand in hand with the mundane, the excessive that is embedded in the lack. Even more so, it is the extreme that makes the mundane visible and the

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[20] Jean-Luc Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure: The Deconstruction of Christianity*, trans. Bettina Bergo, Gabriel Malenfant, and Michael B. Smith (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008),, 10.
[21] Nancy, *Dis-Enclosure*, 8.

excessive that brings the lack into relief. It is only against the underlying hyperbolic conditions that something like the ordinary can come into being.

The serious things of which we speak—and the list could be lengthened to include such pressing matters as beauty and love—are serious precisely because they bring into relief our finitude, the limits of our being. Standing before the sublime, whether beautiful or terrible, we are at the edge of experience, overwhelmed and without the capacity to say what we see exactly. Our words escape us and we are left often with a set of feelings or gestures with which we can only hint. Let us think for a moment about death. Death places us at the limit, whether the limit of our existence or the limit of our understanding. When someone close to us dies, the absolute fragility and contingency of existence is brought into relief. We are moved beyond ourselves to the acknowledgement of our finitude and of the inevitability of our end. Moreover, when another dies with them dies also a web of meaning and significance. Think too of how difficult it is to share words with someone who is grieving. We take shelter in the ready-made phrases: "My condolences," "You're in my thoughts and prayers," because there is nothing else to be said. It is not that these phrases are disingenuous; on the contrary, they mark the limit of our words to convey the fullness of our response. Like the experience of the serious, so too does hyperbole bring us to the limits of our linguistic capacities.

Hyperbole and finitude go hand in hand as a way in which being is disclosed. To acknowledge our finitude is to concede the hyperbolic. Setting aside beliefs of a more perfect world after this one, even a purely a-theistic examination of death must acknowledge the existence of a world beyond our death, this world to be sure, but

altogether different without our dwelling within it. Finitude necessitates a beyond that cannot be explained, the *alogon*. Our lives are a testimony to this fact.

Although Nancy is trying to make an historical argument about the ontological significance of Christianity, I believe we can examine the relationship between the *logos* and the *alogon* beyond this religious context through expanding our understanding of testimony (which itself extends beyond the religious). Indeed, Nancy himself seems to be moving this claim toward an ontological principle.

Let us turn then to the *alogon*, the excessive that exists alongside *logos*, and see what it might show us. To take up this task of examining hyperbole philosophically, I will offer three sketches of increasingly complexity, first of Plato, then Nietzsche, and finally Heidegger each of whom offer divergent understandings of hyperbole with respect to the human condition and consequently offer multiple perspectives on the relationship between language and life. With each pass at understanding hyperbole we will speak of something serious, for indeed, what else is worth our words?

4.3 The Epistemic Function of Hyperbole—Plato's Mythologies

> He took a book from a shelf, and as he brought it up to his chest it passed from shadow into one of the sun shafts. He held the book there, looking at that book, that light, that dust. It was as those there were two worlds. This world, and a hidden world that it took the momentary shafts of late-afternoon light to reveal as the real world—of flying particles wildly spinning, shimmering, randomly bouncing into each other and heading off into entirely new directions.
>
> Richard Flanagan, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*

Philosophy was born to address serious things. The pre-Socratics were concerned with nothing short of the stuff of the universe and the laws by which it appeared to human beings. More so, early Greek philosophy tried to make sense of its mythical

inheritance—the aperture of being in that early epoch—in a way that suited the rise of rationality. We witness here a change in paradigms and an attempt to appropriate the tradition in a way fitting to the new circumstances. The gods become increasingly weakened, functioning more as exemplars and inspirations than omnipotent forces. With the gods no longer offering sufficient explanation for the workings of the universe, their epistemic value is brought into question. Although the pre-Socratics still turned to mythology for questions of ethics and being-together, questions of knowledge began to shift toward a rising rationality.

With this in mind, philosophy's relationship to rhetoric has no doubt been a complicated one and no less so within Plato's *Dialogues*. Certainly the very structure of the texts as dialogues already moves philosophy into the realm of rhetoric and literature wherein figures of speech are readily at play. Through a dialogic form, Plato takes up the rhetorical tradition in various ways so as to make his philosophic position understandable; one might go so far as to say it is the addition of literary and rhetorical nuance that gives the insights of Socratic reasoning its full force and without which we would merely have the cold feel of dialectical rationality. Indeed, what words of Socrates would stay with us without his customary weirdness to bolster our spirits. Gadamer lends insight into this need for literature when he writes, "Philosophy continually finds itself in a state of linguistic need. This is constitutive of philosophy, and this calamity, this distress, becomes all the more felt, the more boldly the philosopher breaks new paths."[22] We witness this linguistic need within the works of Plato. To be sure, Plato, through his

[22] Hans-Georg Gadamer, "Autobiographical Reflections," in *The Gadamer Reader: A Bouquet of Later Writings,* ed. Richard E. Palmer (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007), 36.

Socrates, breaks away from the tradition of mystics and sages and lays the groundwork for philosophy, i.e., for loving (rather than already having) wisdom. Furthermore, as we well know, part of Plato's great genius is that he demonstrated in the time of supreme rhetorical flourishing produced by the Sophists that he could outdo them all without forsaking truth for linguistic beauty. He knew well that the truth was fine enough to surpass any rhetorical accoutrements.

Beyond their dialogic form, we can view this distinction between philosophy on the one hand and rhetoric or literature on the other through the opposition between logos and mythos. By doing so, we can approach the hyperbolic force at work in Plato's *Dialogues.* These two terms in pre-Socratic Greek philosophy were often found hand in hand—indeed, as Heidegger later reads the Greek situation, "The mythos is that appeal of foremost and radical concern to all human beings which makes man think of what appears, what is in being. Logos says the same; mythos and logos are not, as our current historians of philosophy claim, placed into opposition by philosophy as such."[23] Both mythos and logos then are attempts to give voice to our most serious concerns. Although such a distinction between terms is not necessary, it nevertheless begins to emerge in Plato's *Dialogues*.

Plato's use of myth is two-fold. First, we have his appropriation of traditional myths. Here Plato draws significantly from Homer and these are often the myths to which his interlocutors make reference for sources of evidence in defending themselves against the superior strength of Socrates' reasoning. For example, early in the *Phaedrus* the myth

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[23] Martin Heidegger, *What is Called Thinking*?, trans. J. Glenn Gray (New York: Harper Perennial, 1968), 10.

of Boreas is recounted as Socrates and Phaedrus have decided to discuss the ways of love and language at the alleged site where Boreas seized Orithyia. Phaedrus asks Socrates if he believes the story to be true and Socrates responds, "I myself certainly have no time for the business, and I tell you why, my friend. I can't as yet 'know myself' as the inscription at Delphi enjoins, and so long as that ignorance remains it seems to me ridiculous to inquire into extraneous matters."[24] Here, Socrates proclaims myth to be superfluous with regard to the most important of all matters, knowing oneself. In this respect, mythological narratives turn one's attention away from oneself and toward the external world and its trivialities. The hyperbolic act of going beyond oneself, that is, going beyond one's capacity for self-reflection on the issues most central to living well, and into the trivial world is a form of hyperbole for which Socrates, and Plato with him, has no patience.

This is not the final word on myth however, as we also have the myths and allegories that Plato himself invents. To name a few: the *Gorgias* myth (523a–527a), the myth of the androgyne (*Symposium* 189d–193d), the *Phaedo* myth (107c–115a), the myth of Er (*Republic* 614a–621d), the myth of the winged soul (*Phaedrus* 246a–249d), the myth of Theuth (*Phaedrus* 274c–275e). Here Socrates is not drawing explicitly from a commonly held heritage that covers over the truth of existence—these are the myths that he believes we would do well to get over—but draws rather from the power of the imagination to give form to and crystalize what at times appear to be seemingly abstract ideas. In other words, he reaches out to the imagination to give an image of the truth that

[24] Plato, "Phaedrus," in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato,* eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairnes, trans. R. Hackforth (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 230a.

he is trying to describe. Socrates does not have a problem with myths per se, as his comments in *Phaedrus* might lead us to believe, but instead eschews myths that promote a way of life that is not self-reflexive. Among these mythic inventions, Ludwig Edelstein offers a further distinction between kinds of myths, "those dealing with an account of the creation of the world and with an account of the early history of mankind, and those that deal with the fate of the soul before and after this life and have a bearing not on metaphysics or science but rather on ethics."[25] In both modes of myth Socrates reaches beyond that which can be delivered to one by purely logical reason (dialectic) and toward the creative impetus that can give flesh and blood to that which dialectic leaves rather lifeless. What I wish to show here is that myth understood generally as a form of narrativity takes on a hyperbolic force within the Platonic *Dialogues* and mediates the relationship between knowing oneself and having knowledge of the truth of being. In going beyond dialectic to myth, what I am calling here a hyperbolic movement, the Platonic *Dialogues* take on a livelier existential characterization. This occurs through the development of paradox within the text, a narratival confusion between myth and reality. Joshua Ritter in his essay "Recovering Hyperbole" illuminates this writing,

> Hyperbolic paradox stretches the imagination through its extravagance and in one's ambiguous apprehension of it, because it is only in the obscure space of "para" [i.e., of paradox] that one is disoriented enough to surrender to

[25] Ludwig Edelstein, "The Function of Myth in Plato's Philosophy," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 10(1949), 467.

> presuppositions about thought and reality, thereby preparing the way for a newly reimagined perspective.[26]

Through shifting between dialectic and myth, the reader of the *Dialogues* is hermeneutically disoriented and from within this disorientation opened up to new perspectives that were previously inaccessible through dialectical routes. It is not an issue of whether or not any of Plato's myths are true, nor whether they accord with our experience of the world. Instead, what is of significance is the way in which this tension between dialectic and myth turns our attention to something new. In other words, this paradox generates the space for new thinking.

In addition to this hyperbolic force on the scale of narrativity, hyperbole is also at work as a rhetorical trope with an epistemological function. Let us take as our primary example Plato's *Symposium* in conjunction with his famous description of the "divided line" in the *Republic*. Here Plato raises the question "What is love (Eros)?" by setting the stage for a gathering of some of the greatest minds in Greece at the time. He offers series of accounts of love such that we might know love when we see it.[27] After hearing genealogies of Eros, of common and heavenly love, of the origins of the human form from the likes of Pausanias, Aristophanes, and Agathon, Socrates first utilizes dialectic to question previous accounts of Eros. Upon doing so, he moves beyond this strategy toward a recollection of what he learned of love from the priestess Diotima. Here the very trajectory of the story moves ever beyond itself in wider circles and Socrates himself

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[26] Ritter, "Recovering Hyperbole: Rethinking the Limits of Rhetoric for an Age of Excess," 411.

[27] For an account of the *Symposium* with regard to philosophy as a way of life and communicative praxis, see Ramsey Eric Ramsey and Jessica N. Sturgess, "The strange leisure of the snake-bitten: Listening to the wonder of Socrates," *Listening*, 46, 5-20.

throws his understanding of love beyond himself to the words of a wiser woman. Through what he learned from Diotima, Socrates grounds love as the desire for "the conception and generation that the beautiful effects."[28] Socrates then offers an image of what this looks like, bringing the hyperbolic force of the text into relief. The process of love is an ascension, Socrates claims, from the love of one individual body, to the form of all bodies, to the beauty of the soul wherein "he will find it beautiful enough to quicken in his heart a longing for such discourse as tends toward the building of a noble nature." From there he will contemplate the beauty of this discourse on a wider scale, laws and institutions, and then finally to the beauty of all kinds of knowledge. Socrates tells us, "And turning his eyes toward the open sea of beauty, he will find in such contemplation the seed of the most fruitful discourse and the loftiest thought, and reap a golden harvest of philosophy, until, confirmed and strengthened, he will come upon one single form of knowledge."[29]

As with so many of the *Dialogues* we find here the ascension from the everyday to the realm of the pure forms, another take on the story of the divided line in the *Republic*. This upward process of continually moving beyond mere becoming (the holding of opinions and beliefs about things in the world which pass away) to knowledge (not of worldly phenomena, but of the intelligible order of the world) makes an ever-expanding pathway from the everyday to the pure forms of the true, the just, and in the

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[28] Plato, "Symposium," *The Collected Dialogues of Plato,* eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairnes, trans. Michael Joyce (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 206e.
[29] Plato, "Symposium," 210a-210d.

case of *Symposium*, the beautiful. All of these themselves point to that which is supra-essential, that which is beyond being, the good. As Socrates tells Glaucon in the *Republic*,

> In like manner, then, you are to say that the objects of knowledge not only receive from the presence of the good their being known, but their very existence and essence is derived to them from it, though the good itself is not essence but still transcends essence in dignity and surpassing power.

To which Glaucon replies: "Heaven save us, hyperbole can no further go."[30] Glaucon addresses the rhetorical figure critically; the words of Socrates and the ideas therein have exceeded the limits of rationality—they cannot go on any further. But this transcendence is itself hyperbolic. Indeed, in *On the Name* Jacques Derrida defines hyperbole with respect to this moment of the *Republic* as "the movement of transcendence that carries or transports beyond being or beingness."[31] In other words, hyperbole as the progressive moving beyond from becoming to being and further to that which is beyond being, from opinion to knowledge of the forms to the good, serves an epistemological purpose in the Platonic *Dialogues*. Rather than simply (though not merely) serving a rhetorical function, hyperbole is the device through which we can gain an understanding of how knowledge works. It has, so to speak, an epistemological function about epistemology itself by delimiting the knowledge to which we have access and that which is beyond our intellectual capacities. In other words, hyperbole helps to make manifest and understandable the Delphic injunction to "Know Thyself" by clarifying what is possible

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[30] Plato, "Republic," *The Collected Dialogues of Plato,* eds. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairnes, trans. Paul Shorey (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 509c.

[31] Jacques Derrida, *On the Name*, trans. David Wood (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995), 64.

for a self to know and what lies beyond the realm of self-knowledge. For Plato to articulate that about which he was convinced, he turned to the *alogon*, the willful lies through which he could disclose the truth. Furthermore, in this turn to hyperbole Plato discloses, perhaps against his will, the way in which the epistemic rests upon the communicative. It is only through the myths and stories, through the dialogue itself, that the insights about knowledge and being can come to light. More so, these rhetorical constructions do not merely represent Plato's epistemology, but fundamentally shape it—indeed, there is no separation between the so-called "content" of Plato's philosophy and the communicative means by which he tried to voice it. The hyperbolic is implicitly tied to knowledge.

4.4 The Ethical and Communicative Function of Hyperbole–Nietzsche's Excesses

> Unceasing human work gave birth to this
> Infinity of books. If of them all
> Not even one remained, man would again
> Beget each page and every line,
> Each work and every love of Hercules,
> And every teaching of every manuscript.
>
> Jorge Luis Borges, "Alexandria, A.D. 641"

Whereas the hyperbole at work in the Platonic *Dialogues* is an outward movement from personal opinion to knowledge of the forms—a movement that passes from the subjective through the external world and then beyond to the conditions for the possibility of knowledge within the external world, Friedrich Nietzsche offers hyperbole of an altogether other sort. Nietzsche, as we well know, wants nothing to do with this divided understanding of knowledge or a focus on that which is extra-worldly but prefers to bring us back down to earth wherein we might be sufficiently and honestly grounded;

nevertheless, in avoiding the extra-worldly Nietzsche does not escape hyperbole but runs headlong into it. Recalling Quintilian, Nietzsche's use of hyperbole is of no surprise given his philosophical style. His use of parables and aphorisms draw the reader outside of the text and turn her to her own understanding. The reader is forced to extend beyond herself and take into account the hermeneutic conditions that lead her to any particular judgment. Indeed, we might call Nietzsche the hyperbolic philosopher par excellence. However, following Paul Ricoeur in his discussion of hyperbole in *Oneself as Another* we must avoid understanding hyperbole in only stylistic terms. Indeed, it is the purpose of this project to elevate hyperbole from a figure to a concept. There Ricoeur writes, "By hyperbole it must be strongly underscored, we are not to understand a figure of style, a literary trope, but the systematic practice of excess in philosophical argumentation."[32] Although within this section Ricoeur is discussing the hyperbole at work in Emmanuel Levinas's writings, I believe the same can be said of Nietzsche. Throughout his corpus, Nietzsche's writing tends toward the excessive—not only in the tone it takes up but equally in the development of his fundamental concepts.

It would be a mistake to understand Nietzsche's tone as a kind of impropriety in the way in which Aristotle characterized hyperbole. Although Nietzsche's works resonate with the young (who has not encountered a young man with Nietzsche in his back pocket, or who has not played that role herself?) it is not itself an immature body of thought. On the contrary, Nietzsche's hyperbolic form speaks to the coldness of Enlightenment rationality, to its at times painful lack of beauty and style. Although it is easy to find a

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[32] Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 337.

thoughtful passage in Kant's *Critiques* or Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, for example, it is quite difficult to find a beautiful one or one that excites and quickens the spirit. This of course was what philosophy, in its focus on systematicity, was lacking during this time: the force of beauty that allowed philosophy to speak to life.[33] It is to this necessity that Nietzsche's work speaks.

For Nietzsche, our experience of truth is shaped by rhetorical practices. In "On Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense" he writes, in a now famous passage,

> What then is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms, in short, a sum of human relations which have been subjected to poetic and rhetorical intensification, translation, and decoration and which, after they have been in use for a long time, strike a people as firmly established, canonical, and binding.[34]

This passage, and the essay more generally, often draws debates regarding the social construction of reality and not surprisingly so. Truth is rhetorically constituted and this constitution is frequently covered over and its derivations are presented as some kind of absolute truth. To the contrary however, these metaphors, metonymies, and anthropomorphisms are simply the way in which we attempt to grasp the experiences of which we believe ourselves convinced. We have, on Nietzsche's account, no recourse to alternative options. Nothing we could say would lie outside the reach of poetic and

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[33] The question then is whether it is possible to do systematic philosophy in our time without abandoning the promise of philosophy as a way of life.

[34] Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense," in *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, edited by Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 146.

rhetorical translation as there is no understanding of language that does not have testimony at its center.

Here, however, I am less concerned with the hyperbole at work in Nietzsche's argumentative strategy, as fascinating as such an inquiry would be.[35] Instead, I wish to examine the way in which a form of hyperbole, for Nietzsche, functions as a description of our communicative capacities. Said differently, Nietzsche begins to mark human beings as themselves hyperbolic (rather than simply users of hyperbole), a line of reasoning I will further develop in my discussion of Martin Heidegger and our hyperbolic ontological constitution. In section 354 of *The Gay Science*, in an aphorism titled "On the 'Genius of the Species'" Nietzsche takes up the question of the development of human consciousness. He gives an etiology of consciousness, writing at length:

> Now, if you are willing to listen to my answer [to the question of the origin of consciousness] and the perhaps *extravagant* surmise that it involves, it seems to me as if the subtlety and strength of consciousness always were proportionate to a man's (or animal's) capacity for communication, and as if this capacity in turn were proportionate to the need for communication […] Where need and distress have forced men for a long time to communicate and to understand each other quickly and subtly, the ultimate result is an *excess of this strength and art of communication—as it were, a capacity that has gradually been accumulated and now waits for an heir who might squander it.* (Those who are called artists are

[35] This project has already been taken up with great skill and precision and I suggest one turn to Allan Megill's *Prophets of Extremity: Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Derrida* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985) or Alexander Nehamas' *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1987) for greater insight.

> these heirs; so are orators, preachers, writers—all of them people who always come at the end of a long chain, "late born" every one of them in the best sense of the word and, as I have said, by their nature *squanderers*.)[36]

Nietzsche admits his hypothesis is extravagant; that is, it exceeds or goes beyond our ordinary understanding. Nevertheless, it is with the same breath that lies and truths are told. What then is Nietzsche trying to get at through a hyperbolic route? To this end, Ritter's insight on the relationship between hyperbole and lie might be of use, "The lie of hyperbole presents one with an opportunity to explore the hermeneutical possibilities for expanding one's conception of truth(s) beyond its conventional bounds."[37] Recalling Nancy, it is this lie, the *alogon*, that makes *logos* possible. As we discussed with Plato, by setting forth the lie we are reoriented toward the truth. In Nietzsche's case, the truth is in distinction to our inherited understandings of consciousness as prior to our communicative capacities. He upends this understanding and pairs consciousness and communication as equiprimordial phenomena. It is not at issue here whether Nietzsche genuinely believes consciousness was a development of herd life, or even more so, as we shall soon see, that consciousness is lamentable. What matters for our understanding of hyperbole is what this stretching of the understanding through exaggeration discloses; that is, the truths that underlie the seeming lies at work in the text. In this way, hyperboles are a form of hermeneutic gymnastics; that is, of keeping the understanding fit such that it is adequately prepared to shoulder the burden of large truths.

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[36] Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 298. Italics my own.
[37] Ritter, "Recovering Hyperbole," 421.

In this aphorism I understand Nietzsche to be saying a human being's capacity for response is proportionate to his or her need for relationships; that is, the intensity of the need for relationships determines the communicative finesse one has—the more we must communicate the better we are able to do so. Originally, our need for communication was derived from our desire to survive. Consequently, on Nietzsche's account consciousness is superfluous; it is an addition or developmental supplement of human beings for the sake of survival. This survival is made more feasible with the assistance of others, as is generally evident in the necessity of communication and communication technologies in the development of civilizations. We might understand communication at this level as the exchange of information that aids in the survival of the species or herd. Indeed, Nietzsche continues in the aphorism, "Consciousness does not really belong to man's individual existence, but rather to his social or herd nature; that, as follows from this, has developed subtlety only insofar as this is required by social or herd utility."[38] The strength of our consciousness and its facility and grace is proportionate to the requirement of social utility. We must remember however that Nietzsche had little appreciation for utility as it is the most calculative and least aesthetically pleasing, least life-affirming, of values. This requirement of herd utility for the development of consciousness is key to the ongoing laying waste of our life-affirming capacities to which Nietzsche draws our attention time and again throughout his work. "Utility," Nietzsche writes, "is ultimately also a mere belief, something imaginary, and perhaps precisely the most calamitous stupidity of which we shall perish some day."[39] What becomes conscious, within this line of thinking

[38] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science,* 299.
[39] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 300.

and this specific need of communication as information exchange, is in the process going to become shallow since it is made conscious only because it is necessary for the herd. The current language of the herd, what we might call the language of utility—concepts such as "facts" and "correctness"—given Nietzsche's larger project, is only so because it is believed to make living easier, more efficient. With facts dwelling in the world is far less burdensome as we have stable grounds upon which we can rest. Facts are useful and can be employed to facilitate even more useful endeavors. Yet perhaps wedged in Nietzsche's critique of communication is a small but viable hope: upon widening our consciousness by recognizing new communicative needs, perhaps we might generate communicative dwelling places that do not fall within the constricting boundaries of herd utility. Perhaps our communicative capacities can be set loose without bounds. Perhaps we might find not just the ability to communicate, but the power to testify.

Whatever hopes we have for twisting-a-way from the crass utilitarianism of the herd rests with those who are willing to be wasteful and extravagant, those who are willing to act against the common injunction of efficiency and utility—i.e., those who are willing to be hyperbolic. Those who are able to be excessive in proportion to the already excessive phenomenon of consciousness will move beyond the yoke of utility. In the development of the art of communication due to the need to quickly distribute information, there resulted the "excess of this strength and art of communication—as it were, a capacity that has gradually accumulated and now waits for an heir who might squander it."[40] In my interpretation of Nietzsche, this squandering is not a misguided and reckless wastefulness, but rather the extravagant spending of what language gives us, as

[40] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 298.

opposed to miserly consciousness of only that which is useful to the herd. These squanderers—the ethically profligate, plentiful, profuse, generous, open-handed and exuberant—are the artists, poets, rhetors, writers, and thinkers who discern that language has been worn out by the base wastefulness of herd utility. One recalls Heidegger's apt and concise admonishment, "With a worn out language everybody can talk about everything."[41] This is not a facile critique of the democratization of language but rather a profound concern that with the wearing down of language—i.e., with the reduction of communication to the transference of what is useful—the essence of communication is covered over. In all this talk about everything nothing is said, or at least nothing that speaks of serious things.

Squandering does not mean that language is employed without care and anything can be said to anyone willing to listen. Instead, the squanderers squander by using the accrued strength of communication to bring us back to what is near; squandering attempts to give voice to the being in the world that we are. The exemplar squanderer is not the politician, who today seem to be saying things so carelessly that one wonders if words any longer have value, but the poet. It is these squanderers, in their extravagant participation with language, who revive it and allow language to speak our disclosive nature. The squanderer writes for everyone and for no one; she writes with something to say but without the purposiveness of direct communication. Nothing is exchanged, but something is communicated. Squandering, in its excessive spending, allows a glimpse at the immense power of language. The poem is always about its subject, yes, but simultaneously every poem is likewise a poem about language itself.

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[41] Heidegger, *What Is Called Thinking?,* 127.

Experiencing the world outside the constraints of utility is among the most difficult challenges we can undertake. To be sure, our everyday habits of interpretation and actions are embedded in the useful—perhaps nothing causes so much anguish as not 'feeling of any use' to society. However, as Heidegger notes, "the most useful is the useless…yet one must look upon the useful as 'that which makes someone whole,' that is, what makes the human being at home with himself."[42] That is to say, that which gives us the greatest satisfaction, a sense of genuine flourishing, are those undertakings which escape the grasps of utility—what for Nietzsche would be the practice of the arts.[43] The squandering work of the artist and the thinker is such that they turn us away from utility and toward other possibilities for dwelling together. The poem twists-a-way from the narrow confines of a worn out language and, through the arrangement of words, opens out upon a vista of new insights and possibilities. Perhaps this is why we feel so buoyed and safe in the world when we stumble upon a passage of literature that seems to speak directly to us, that seems to open new worlds we did not even know were possible.

It is this excess that gives content to our articulation of testimony. Testimony is that understanding of communication which sees all speaking as excessive and as a practice of squandering. Language, in its inability to match in equal measure the resources of speech to the experience of being in the world, is always a lavish attempt to

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[42] Heidegger, *Zollikon Seminars*, ed. Medard Boss and trans. Franz Mayr (Chicago: Northwestern University Press, 2001), 159-160.

[43] In a beautiful meditation on this passage Ramsey Eric Ramsey illuminates the uselessness necessary for a genuine education. It is the true mission of the university not to train students to be well fit for their employment, but to cultivate a character befitting to a community of care. Cf. "On the Dire Necessity of the Useless: Philosophical and Rhetorical Thoughts on Hermeneutics and Education in the Humanities," in *Education, Dialogue, and Hermeneutics*, ed. Paul Fairfield (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2011), 91-105.

say something knowing all the while a final word can never be said – the spending must occur without reserve and without reservation. Stephen Webb, approaching the question from a theological perspective, offers keen insight into the characteristic of such squandering. He writes, "We squander when we do not care what the systems that be will do to our gifts, when we defy all of the efforts to make our giving reasonable and prudent. But we also squander from an inner strength, a spiritual richness that suggests that we give because we already have been given too much."[44] Substituting a will to affirm life for Webb's conception of a spiritual richness, squandering becomes an act of freedom, an act of giving without the expectation of return. By living within language hyperbolically we affirm life against the constraints of a utility that is beginning to wear out its welcome. If we are not to perish from this calamitous stupidity, as Nietzsche notes, then our only hope is to turn to the lavishness that the useless affords us and squander it in a manner that is ethically generous. In reading Nietzsche I always imagine the great-souled one as she or he who 'sloshes' goodness, whose fine character overflows into and onto the others around her, whose good acts are done and good words given not for any recognition or praise, but because that is the truest expression of her nature. So too is it with each of us, the hyperbolic character of language grants the opportunity for the sharing of good news in defiance of all that is practical or of use. It is art, Nietzsche shows us, that lays bare and makes visible our communicative capacities, the art of word and image and all that lies between.

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[44] Stephen Webb, "A Hyperbolic Imagination: Theology and the Rhetoric of Excess," *Theology Today* 50(1993), 66.

4.5 The Ontological Function of Hyperbole—Heidegger's Dasein

> In the day I would be reminded of those men and women,
> Brave, setting up signals across vast distances,
> Considering a nameless way of living, of almost unimagined values.
> As the lights darkened, as the lights of night brightened,
> We would try to imagine them, try to find each other,
> To construct peace, to make love, to reconcile
> Waking with sleeping, ourselves with each other,
> Ourselves with ourselves. We would try by any means
> To reach the limits of ourselves, to reach beyond ourselves,
> To let go the means, to wake.
>
> Muriel Rukeyser, *The Speed of Darkness*

Whereas Nietzsche calls on us to become hyperbolic through embracing aestheticism, or embrace our hyperbolicity through a turn to aesthetics, Heidegger shows us that we already are hyperbolic from an ontological perspective. More so, where Plato shows us the necessity of turning to myth and Nietzsche discloses the lack of absolute foundation to knowledge, Heidegger draws these two insights together through showing that our poetic dwelling offers a ground for our being in the world. Having examined the epistemological and ethico-communicative functions of hyperbole, I wish now to turn to what I consider to be the most substantial contribution to the larger conversation surrounding hyperbole. Here hyperbole no longer has a function within a particular philosophic discourse, as we saw with both Plato and Nietzsche, but the hyperbolic becomes an ontological condition of being human. We move from hyperbole as a rhetorical tool to hyperbole as a description of existence. In other words, we can read Heidegger's attempt to speak of serious things (finitude, being-in-the-world, being with other), the disclosure of our hyperbolic constitution.

We see this most clearly in his analytic of Dasein in *Being and Time*. In Heidegger's fundamental ontology, being-in is an *existentiale* and not a category; being-in signifies an ontological condition rather than an ontic property. The being-in of Dasein is not "the kind of Being which an entity has when it is 'in' another one, as the water is 'in' the glass, or the garment is 'in' the cupboard."[45] Being-in otherwise than water or a garment highlights the way in which Dasein is fundamentally (i.e., ontologically) not a corporeal thing. Human beings are radically unlike everything else, not by degree, but fundamentally so. There is, for Heidegger, and absolute abyss between Dasein and all other entities. Moreover, as he argues later in the same section, "Being-in is not a 'property' which Dasein sometimes has and sometimes does not have, and without which it could be just as well as it could with it."[46] Instead, Dasein "resides alongside" or is "absorbed in the world." To be sure, such residing alongside is not like that of two objects in proximity to one another, but the ability for an entity to encounter the world. This encountering the world as world, a communicative phenomenon, is what distinguishes Dasein from everything else. For this to be the case, Heidegger offers an analysis of Dasein such that Dasein is not reducible to an object present-to-hand or best explicated by turning to the being of things. Certainly Dasein can be reduced to or treated as if it were a mere thing, we have much historical evidence of such an approach—it is the scientism that we brought into question in the first chapter—but this is possible only on the condition of Dasein existing primordially as being-in-the-world. It is this

[45] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 79.
[46] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 84.

ontological fact that then opens up the possibility of Dasein dwelling in the world authentically or inauthentically.

With this in mind, we must ask who is this Dasein, this being-in-the-world? Of course, the entirety of *Being and Time* attempts to address this question so as to prepare to ask the question of the meaning of being. What I wish to show here is that at least one possible way to respond to the question of who is Dasein is to say Dasein is the being who dwells in the world hyperbolically. We can see this by addressing Heidegger's conception of thrownness, transcendence, and ek-stasis and the theoretical implications that fall out from such claims.

Beginning with thrownness, Heidegger writes in a discussion of Dasein's faciticity,

> 'whence' and 'whither,' yet disclosed in itself all the more unveiledly; we call it the 'thrownness' of this entity into its 'there'; indeed, it is thrown in such a way that, as Being-in-the-world, it is the 'there.' The expression 'thrownness' is meant to suggest the facticity of its being delivered over.[47]

Into what is Dasein thrown? Into a state-of-mind, an understanding, and discourse—to wit, the three constitutive elements of the existential analytic of Dasein. Dasein always finds itself in a particular state-of-mind or attunement through which the world shows itself in a specific manifestation, and in an interpretive understanding that allows the world and Dasein's relationship to it to be meaningfully projected, as well as discourse, the totality of references that give the world and Dasein communicable meaning. Said differently, Dasein is thrown into the world already underway and from within this

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[47] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 174.

having already begun, is ensconced within a state-of-mind, understanding, and discursive practices. Furthermore, this thrownness is saturated in finitude; that is, Dasein is thrown into its possibilities as the ground of decision and from out of these possibilities must make choices to take up some possibilities while leaving other possibilities unactualized. Indeed, finitude is the hyperbolic existentialized. Finitude, the acknowledgement that one day we shall die and this shall be over, all of it, launches us into the future. Dasein has but one direction: forward. Onward. To be thrown is to move on. One cannot ask from whence she is thrown, but must from this having-been thrown resolutely take up living together with others.

Dasein, as we recall from our discussion of cynicism in the first chapter, in its everyday being fails to acknowledge this thrownness but instead takes up this thrownness by attempting to ignore it and flee into comfort of the everyday with the tranquilization that it offers. It is thrownness that makes possible Dasein coming to understand itself and it is the lack of acknowledgment towards this thrownness that mires Dasein in a restricted understanding of its worldiness. Dasein is itself because it is outside of, beyond itself, thrown into the world and thrown into everydayness. Dasein is, as we shall explore shortly, ek-static. Heidegger calls the everyday "who" of Dasein the They-self or Anyone (*das Man*), a who who is both everyone and no one, a constitutive structure of our existence. One's They-self is the public ego is what we have in common with everyone else. There is nothing special nor unique about the They. Our primary mode of existence is as the They—we strive to keep everything easy, to abide by convention. The force of the They, a force which we have internalized and made our own, limits the range of

possibilities that any given Dasein can take up if the They remains unexamined. Heidegger clarifies the role of averageness, lending a sense of urgency to our own project:

> In this averageness with which it prescribes what can and may be ventured, it [the They] keeps watch over everything exceptional that thrusts itself to the fore. Every kind of priority gets noiselessly suppressed. Overnight, everything that is primordial gets glossed over as something that has long been well known. Everything gained by a struggle becomes just something to be manipulated. Every secret loses its force. The care of averageness reveals in turn an essential tendency of Dasein which we call the 'leveling down' of all possibilities of Being.[48]

This leveling down of possibilities of Being occurs through publicness. Publicness determines the way in which things are interpreted, as through it "everything gets obscured, and what has thus been covered up gets passed off as something familiar and accessible to everyone."[49] This is not to say that in the They all is lost; on the contrary, everything merely remains as it is without any reflection or celebration. It is glossed over, another moment in the passage of time that occurs without incident. With respect to the question of the meaning of being, such questions lose their priority and fail to be asked with any degree of care. Moreover, that which seems to concern us most (e.g., petty affairs, prestige, wealth, etc.) fails to be of ultimate concern (e.g., learning to live well with one another). Said differently, in the publicness of the They we fail to speak of serious things. Let us remember the Socrates of the *Apology* here as an illustration. Socrates found himself mired in the status quo, out of place, weird, and thus struggled

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[48] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 165.
[49] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 165.

throughout his life to search for wisdom, to love wisdom and thus to practice philosophy. He freed himself with visions of fame or wealth and focused on the only practice that mattered: attempting to live in accordance with philosophy as a way of life.

The fundamental problem of the They is that it allows Dasein disburden itself of itself; Dasein no longer acknowledges responsibility and complicity. Let us be clearer for a moment: there are not some who fall prey to the They and some who do not—the They is a constitutive feature of each individual. I prefer to think of it in terms of moments; at moments we rely upon the status quo, on our habits and pre-made interpretations. At other times, however brief, we resolve upon our actions and interpretations and put them to work freely and with a sense of responsibility. In the manifestation of its They-self, Dasein surrenders itself to the indistinguishable mass of publicness. Heidegger states with an eloquence worth quoting at length as it gives further illumination of the ideological saturation, whether fundamentalism or cynicism, we wish to critique.

> In utilizing public means of transport and in making use of information services such as the newspaper, every Other is like the next. This Being-with-one-another dissolves one's own Dasein completely into a kind of Being of 'the Others', in such a way, indeed, that the Others, as distinguishable and explicit, vanish more and more. In this inconspicuousness and unascertainability, the real dictatorship of the 'they' is unfolded. We take pleasure and enjoy ourselves as *they* take pleasure; we read, see, and judge about literature and art as *they* see and judge; likewise we shrink back from the 'great mass' as *they* shrink back; we find 'shocking' what *they* find shocking. The 'they', which is nothing definite, and

> which all are, though not as the sum, prescribes the kind of Being of everydayness.[50]

In the They "everyone is the other, and no one is himself."[51] The interpretation of the world to which we are constantly given over in our average understanding, state-of-mind, and discourse allows for the possibility of experiencing the world without ever making it one's own, that is, without grounding it in authentic possibility. Whether we believe him to be genuine or not, it is important to note that for Heidegger this is not a moral issue. The They is an ontological necessity that precedes any issues of wrongdoing. Indeed, we rely on our They-selves as a repertoire of responses in our existing. In a sense, the They has much in common with Gadamer's articulation of prejudice, our pre-made habits of interpretation and action. We can reflect upon those prejudices—such is the project of hermeneutics. Being resolute, then, means being hermeneutical. Acknowledging this is the task we constantly face, a task more pressing than any other, is the practice of freedom.

This understanding of thrownness turns us to the central issue in Heidegger's work that speaks directly to the philosophical account of hyperbole we are developing here: transcendence. Transcendence, he notes, is a kind of surpassing—the going-beyond that I want to argue the concept of hyperbole marks. Dasein has transcendence as the fundamental constitution of its being, "one that occurs prior to all comportment."[52] This does not merely mean Dasein is capable of surpassing boundaries in space, but more

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[50] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 164. Italics MH.
[51] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 165.
[52] Heidegger, "On the Essence of Ground," in *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 108.

primordially, it is because Dasein is always already transcendence, always already surpassing, that it is able to encounter boundaries as such. This also means that transcendence is not an action of any individual Dasein that we can point to and analyze, but is the condition for the possibility of all action. Furthermore, surpassing is not something Dasein sometimes does once and a while, but Dasein is always, by virtue of being Dasein, surpassing. That towards which Dasein transcends is the world. Consequently, Dasein is transcendent as being-in-the-world. Dasein exceeds the subject-object distinction, and exists within the ontological difference between being and beings.

As transcendence, Dasein projects world and projects the possibilities of itself. The fact the world appears to us as meaningful—that the entities and equipment in the world present themselves as things that we can make sense of—demonstrates our constitution as projection. Imagine, for example, that we find ourselves at the airport. The entities and equipment of the airport—security guards, ticket counters, baggage claims, conveyer walkways, luggage—each of these appears as meaningful (i.e., we can take them as something, which as we recall is a hermeneutic and communicative task) and appears meaningful in relation to the project within which they are. In this case, the project might be traveling afar on vacation. Entities in the world show themselves as hindrances or affordances within the intending toward the world in the manner of leisure travel. Dasein's transcendence makes this intentionality possible. The projection of possibilities is always in excess of what we intend. That is to say, within any given project, our interpretation of the entities and equipment could always be otherwise than it appears; for example, we could take the conveyer walkway as something other than an efficient means of transportation and see it instead, perhaps, as a potential danger.

Heidegger returns this idea to hyperbole claiming "in this process [Dasein as transcendent] Dasein in each case exceeds itself."[53] Dasein is hyperbolic in its being-thrown and in its always being-in-excess.

At its core, however, Dasein is a nullity; it dwells within a foundationless space. With regard to the They, when we stop judging as they do, stop thinking and acting as they do, we discover that there is no foundational basis for our decisions on how to think or act. Dasein is thrown into this position, thrown from nothingness, as transcendence. In grounding Dasein as care—as concern for pragmata and solicitude toward others—Heidegger, like Nietzsche before him, bars access to a foundational basis. There is no immutable substance that secures subjectivity. Heidegger writes,

> To this entity it has been delivered over, and as such it can exist solely as the entity which it is; and *as this entity* to which it has been thus delivered over, it *is, in its existing*, the basis of its potentiality-for Being. Although it has *not* laid that basis *itself*, it reposes in the weight of it, which is made manifest to it as a burden by Dasein's mood. And how *is* Dasein this thrown basis? Only in that it projects itself upon possibilities into which it has been thrown. The Self, which as such has to lay a basis for itself, can *never* get that basis into its power; and yet, as existing, it must take over Being-a-basis. To be its own thrown basis is that potentiality-for-Being which is the issue for care.[54]

Dasein is delivered over to itself in its thrownness—in this time and place not of its own choosing—and from out of this thrownness must make a world. The basis upon which

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[53] Heidegger, "On the Essence of Ground," 128.
[54] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 330. Italics MH.

Dasein stands was not chosen; indeed, history has long ago started before any individual Dasein arrives on the scene. This is the anxiety of being in the world; we remain responsible for our existence without having inaugurated it. From out of this nullity we are creative—we make relations and lives and worlds for which we together shoulder the responsibility. Heidegger argues, "Care itself, in its very essence, is permeated with nullity through and through. Thus 'care'—Dasein's Being—means, as thrown projection, Being-the-basis of a nullity…"[55] In this way, one might imagine Dasein living along a trajectory—a line extending futurally but carrying with it both past and present— a line without a beginning and without a clear end. An impossible image that nevertheless speaks a truth.

This is not the final word on Heidegger's hyperbolic constitution of Dasein, as he has still yet to disclose the meaning of being—the overarching question of *Being and Time*. Division Two of the text takes up this question once more and locates the meaning of being for Dasein in temporality. Dasein is as temporality. To claim the meaning of being for Dasein is temporality is simultaneously to say the meaning of being for Dasein is being-hyperbolic. Heidegger radically reconceptualizes the history of philosophy's conception of time, particularly those offered by Aristotle and Kant. Temporality is neither the measurement of movement nor something within which we are embedded and that conditions the possibility of experience. On the contrary, Dasein is temporality. For Heidegger, temporality (and thus Dasein) is ek-static; that is, Dasein is always outside of itself already as temporality. We are not dealing here with clock-time, or time as a sequence of nows, but with time as the very ground of Dasein. Heidegger writes,

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[55] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 331.

"Temporality is the primordial 'outside-of-itself' in and for itself."[56] As temporality, Dasein is caught up in all three moments of time (past, present, and future) simultaneously. Dasein is always thrown-beyond itself into and as the past, present, and future—as historicality, presence, and futurality. We can see this by looking at Heidegger's articulation of projective understanding. He states, "The future makes ontologically possible an entity which is in such a way that it exists understandingly in its potentiality-for-Being. Projection is basically futural; it does not primarily grasp the projected possibility thematically just by having it in view, but it throws itself into it as a possibility."[57] Said otherwise, the future calls us forward and into ourselves, into a position for understanding the past. Furthermore, this temporality can either be taken up authentically or inauthentically:

> Only an entity which, in its Being, is essentially futural so that it is death and can let itself be thrown back upon its factical 'there' by shattering itself against death—that is to say, only an entity which, as futural, is equiprimordially in the process of having-been, can, by handing down to itself the possibility it has inherited, take over its thrownness and be in the moment of vision for 'its time.' Only authentic temporality which is at the same time finite, makes possible something like fate—that is to say, authentic historicality.[58]

To this end, Dasein is thrown into history and in that hyperbolic space must make such an inheritance meaningful.

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[56] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 377.
[57] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 386.
[58] Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 437.

What Heidegger offers in his hermeneutic and existential analytic of Dasein is a way of conceiving the very essence of human being as hyperbolic. Heidegger gives us the hyperbole anterior to hyperbole; that is, the hyperbolic conditions necessary for the manifestation of hyperbole as a figure of speech or rhetorical trope. It is only because of our originary hyperbolic existence that we can then craft something like a figure of speech utilized in turn to express our condition. Yet, with regard to language and communicative praxis, what does this hyperbolic condition look like, how might we see its shape and understand its contours?

4.6 We Are as Openness

Our reading of Plato, Nietzsche, and Heidegger have brought us to an understanding of our limits and excesses whether of an epistemological, communicative, and most importantly ontological manner. We have been calling the ontological constitution of language, which hyperbole brings into relief, testimony. This concept brings with it multiple valences of constituent meanings: opening, excess, squandering, inexhaustible, vastness, and the likes which we have been exploring in the last two chapters. With these hyperbolic elements of testimony in place, let us turn now to what this means for communicative ethics and, as a result, for what we have been so patient: democracy.

In "Originary Ethics" Jean-Luc Nancy draws together the relationship between ontology and ethics through the concept or fact of sense. The being of Dasein is to make sense; that is, Dasein as being-in-the-world is *as* making sense. This making sense is neither theoretical or practical, as if these could actually be pitted against one another. Although Nancy does not put it this way, we might think of it as a kind of *poiesis* or

bringing-forth. Nor is making sense a production of sense. Rather, making sense is a form of conduct—the conduct of human beings. Importantly for Nancy, and imperative for this project, this making sense is not the fixing of sense, i.e., declaring that one thing means something in particular, though of course this is something that human beings do. He is not dealing here with the arbitrariness of any given linguistic system but with what comes prior to any historical language (and yet such a phenomenon is only visible through any ontic existence of a language). Moreover, this is also not the fixing of the sense of the meaning of human being. Dasein as making sense resists this fixing and stasis—it resists being bounded. Fixing the sense of being would be a kind of enclosure that acts against the openness that we are.

This is because sense and finitude go hand in hand. Nancy writes,

> The finitude of Dasein is the finitude of being as the desiring-action of sense. "Finitude," then does not mean a limitation that would relate man—negatively, positively, dialectically—to some other authority from which he could derive his sense, or his lack of it. Instead, it means precisely the non-fixing of such a signification; not, however, as the powerlessness to fix it, but as the power to leave it open.[59]

Finitude is not what prevents us from making sense, but is rather that which makes making sense possible. We make sense because we are finite and we are finite because we stand out in the openness of world disclosure (ek-stasis). In our being-hyperbolic we make sense. We are as the site where being is disclosed and where being can come to

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[59] Jean-Luc Nancy, "Originary Ethics" in *A Finite Thinking*, ed. Simon Sparks (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 178.

make sense as sense. All that is given to us in our finitude, that is to say, all that we are responsible for is the call to make sense. It is this call to which we must respond. This is of course the lesson of fundamental ontology. Nancy's great insight, however, is that "ethics is what is fundamental about fundamental ontology."[60] In a single sentence ethics and ontology are reunited without one taking priority over the other.

On this reading, ethics is not some signification or value we fix and stabilize, around which we then orient our actions. On the contrary, ethics, or originary ethics as Nancy calls it, underlies all possible ethical signification and is a "total and joint responsibility" toward making sense or making meaning from within the space of our finitude, from within our ek-sistence. It is through ek-stasis or our being open in the most fundamental way—our being as openness, our being as the there of the disclosure of being—that brings us in relation to each other. Originary ethics has hyperbole at its heart. This openness is of course not a solitary one. Being open is, as Heidegger's fundamental ontology failed to make clear enough but what we must say as many times as can be suffered, always already a being-with. Heidegger showed us a version of this in his description of the They, though this gives being-with a too negative tinge. At the level of ontology we are always already with others and this being-together predicates the possibility of communication or, understood differently, it is the primordial form of communication that makes possible any specific utterance.

Let us remember our earlier epigraph from Nancy wherein he claimed being is communication. Language or communication is not some privileged form of conduct wherein we use language at some moment and not at another. Nothing here is being put

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[60] Nancy, "Originary Ethics," 189.

to use. Rather, language is "the element in which conduct confirms itself as conduct of sense."[61] Language, as the "house of Being" for Heidegger is the dwelling within the conduct of making sense of being. Nancy writes, "In truth, 'language' designates much less the order of the verbal than that on the basis of which this order can take place, and which is, precisely, the experience of transcendence (or, more exactly, experience as transcendence, and as its responsibility)."[62] To be sure once more, this transcendence is not some extra-worldly calling but the transcendence of being-in-the-world, the transcendence of ek-stasis, of standing-out in the world meaningfully. Language, communication, is hyperbolic. Communication is not "the communication of a message (of a signification), but that of making-sense-in-common, something that is quite different from common sense. It is finitude as sharing."[63] It is this finitude as sharing, this keeping open against enclosure, for which we are responsible. We must bear it and it is that to which we must constantly respond.

This is a bearing of and in language, a responsibility to "respect and care for the job of making-sense; the refusal, consequently, to reduce it to facile moralizations or aestheticizing reductions."[64] Let us call democracy that ethical and political configuration of being-together that takes this responsibility seriously. The two threats to democracy with which we have been concerned throughout this project fail to shoulder this responsibility in different ways. Fundamentalism tries ceaselessly to fix meaning that is at its core unfixable. It tries, desperately at times, to ignore the finitude of human beings

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[61] Nancy, "Originary Ethics," 187.
[62] Nancy, "Originary Ethics," 187.
[63] Nancy, "Originary Ethics," 195.
[64] Nancy, "Originary Ethics," 193.

and consequently the finitude of meaning. It tries, often successfully, to enclose that which would make clear the primacy of dis-enclosure. Cynicism, on the other hand, has little concern for the fixing of meaning but fails to acknowledge the way in which this task is shared. By focusing on one's own self-interest and failing to account for one's responsibilities to others, the cynic overlooks being-with beyond the yoke of utility. This is, admittedly, not the understanding of democracy with which we are most familiar. Indeed, this is a sense of democracy that has not yet arrived but it is, I am hopeful, on its way.

I have argued throughout that whatever democracy we might develop requires foremost an understanding of the conditions of communication, what I am calling testimony. In his essay "What Two Looks Can Teach or Hermeneutic Lessons of the Double Feature," Ramsey Eric Ramsey offers this project the faith it requires, writing, "Hermeneutics…teaches us every spring will have something of winters past within it."[65] This meditation on hermeneutic inheritance poetically illuminates the role of tradition on the development of future understandings, whether those moments from the tradition are oppressive or liberatory. With this at hand I wish in the following chapter to examine a few flashes among most insightful moments of our winters past, namely the works of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Walt Whitman. These three writers, simultaneously champions and skeptics of democracy, wrote during some of the most trying times in United States history yet nevertheless found solidarity amid relentless strife. What I aim to do is recover these democratic impulses while simultaneously

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[65] Ramsey Eric Ramsey, "What Two Looks Can Teach or Hermeneutic Lessons of the Double Feature," in *Hermeneutics—Ethics—Education*, edited by Andrzej Wierciński (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2015), 350.

drawing from them the resources to develop a philosophical account of testimony as the conditions for the possibility of communication, to develop a philosophical account of finitude as sharing.

CHAPTER 5. UTOPIAN THINKING IN A NARROWED WORLD: A QUASI-TRANSCENDENTAL APPROACH TO COMMUNICATION

> *The act of faith demanded in bearing witness exceeds, through its structure, all intuition and all proof, all knowledge.*
>
> *Jacques Derrida, "Faith and Knowledge"*

5.1 Setting Sail

> And I add my own voice to the history of people who have loved beautiful things, and looked out for them, and pulled them from the fire, and sought them when they were lost, and tried to preserve them and save them while passing them along literally from hand to hand, singing out brilliantly from the wreck of time to the next generation of lovers, and the next.
>
> Donna Tartt, *The Goldfinch*

Throughout this project there has been an ethical and political impulse, a utopian desire we might say, for things to be otherwise than they are—a world with greater justice, well-being, and solidarity. What prevents this change, this revolution in both thought and action, could be described in lists too long to measure. This is, after all, what grants the virtues of ideological critique: the ceaseless desire, with steadfast commitment to match, to describe the mechanisms of power and its sites of resistance, or, as Adorno and Horkheimer have so concisely put it, "to be clearer about the terrible state in which everything is."[213] The only benefit to the state of the world, if we might crassly call it a benefit, is that it is so troubled one has a multiplicity of theoretical options of where to start in one's critique. From psychoanalysis to critical theory, feminisms to race,

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[213] Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 198.

Marxism to queer theory, and beyond there are endless beginnings. Each serves as a way to map the world and its workings, a way to trace out topologies of disenchantment, alienation, and despair. For our purposes we have traced the dual problems of contemporary neoliberal globalization, fundamentalism and cynicism, and the consequent necessity of understanding the communicative underpinnings of our being in the world. In this chapter, we will build upon this task, turning to a rich inheritance in the American literary tradition, and expose the possibilities of response through an appropriation of sources typically overlooked in the history of philosophy.

Before we are underway, however, let us turn to two metaphors, both maritime in nature, to help us get our bearings, first from Oscar Wilde and then from his contemporary, who is always nearby in this project, Friedrich Nietzsche. These passages send us on our way, the first as a jubilant exhortation and the second as a cautious watchword. In his 1891 "The Soul of Man Under Socialism," a treatise on the relationship between aesthetics and living well together, Wilde writes in defense of utopia:

> A map of the world that does not include Utopia is not worth even glancing at, for it leaves out the one country at which Humanity is always landing. And when Humanity lands there, it looks out, and, seeing a better country, sets sail.[1]

To our ears, this could ring a bit of an outdated modernist emphasis on progress, as if history were a linear trajectory that, would we finally find our guiding star, we might actually get on course and find ourselves heading in a favorable direction. Nevertheless,

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[1] Oscar Wilde, "The Soul of Man Under Socialism" in *The Soul of Man Under Socialism and Selected Critical Prose* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2001), 141.

if we put our postmodern proclivities aside, we see that the utopian desire to improve our lot, what Wilde describes as as impulse to "set sail," is what makes the map worth reading (and, we might add, worth sketching out in the first place). In other words, it is the care for where we might go that confirms the value in detailing where we are. Critical theorizing absent a utopian desire, then, is not worth our while for it leaves out the future for which we are all responsible. Despite the slurs against utopianism which assail us from left and right, we will not abandon this hope.

That said, our hopes ought not be blind. Our second orienting passage, written only a few years earlier, resounds in a different key. Nietzsche writes not of utopia but the infinite in aphorism 124 of *The Gay Science* (the passage directly preceding the Madman who we encountered earlier):

> We have left the land and have embarked. We have burned our bridges behind us—indeed, we have gone farther and destroyed the land behind us. Now, little ship, look out! Beside you is the ocean: to be sure, it does not always roar, and at times it lies spread out like silk and gold and reveries of graciousness. But hours will come when you will realize that it is infinite and that there is nothing more awesome than infinity. Oh, the poor bird that felt free and now strikes the walls of this cage! Woe, when you feel homesick for the land as if it had offered more *freedom*—and there is no longer any "land."[2]

Nietzsche reminds us here of the force that is born out of what we do not have. Without recourse to any land—that is, without recourse to any fixed certainties, the destroyed land behind us—we sail on upon a sea that oscillates between gift and danger. Nostalgia is not

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[2] Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, 180-181. Italics FN.

an option as the past that once was (if it ever was) cannot be re-lived and we must forge ahead anew. From one moment to the next what lies ahead remains a mystery for we know not how the world will show itself. We feel as if we are too free, as it was the numerous constraints on our freedom that made being free bearable. Homesick though we might be, we have only ourselves, which is to say each other and the words and actions between us. Utopia and the infinite are not unalike. Each stretches before us in incalculable dimensions. So we must set forth, jubilant about our possibilities but sober in our lack of recourse to any stable ground upon which we can rest easy.

Although we are absent the recourse to solid land of which Nietzsche speaks, the sea itself is still something, still a place where we can begin. Recalling from the previous chapter the hermeneutic lesson that every spring has something of winters past within it—i.e., the emancipatory thinking called for today does not necessitate ignoring the strategies of resistance or utopian potentials of the past—I wish to suggest here that we turn, without any hint of nostalgia, to three thinkers who, though often overlooked in the philosophic tradition, nevertheless speak to our contemporary circumstances. I suggest we allow Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, and Walt Whitman to be guiding constellations, aids in our navigation that do not themselves assure a safe journey but guarantee that without them we would be worse off. Although we will take note of historical and biographical insights where fitting, my contribution here is not to place these three in their historical context and work out where their thinking converges and diverges. What follows is not an attempt at intellectual history, nor will I examine closely

their internal motivations for writing with regard to their biographical circumstances.[3] Instead, I wish to offer an interpretation of each so as to uncover resources for understanding our current communicative situatedness within the world. In other words, let us learn a little something from those past winters for the sake of future springs by reading them against the grain of their usual reception in the American intellectual tradition.

Although none belonged strictly within the same circles (Emerson and Thoreau had various interactions and founding moments within Transcendentalism, whereas Whitman was relatively outside that milieu), each was writing with a similar purpose: the call for a new America. All three were witness to the rise of industrialism and its concomitant problems, of slavery and the destruction of freedom, of the Civil War, of a burgeoning scientific field of inquiry—in short, they were witness to the beginning of modernity that laid the groundwork for our current philosophical circumstances. Each was doing his best to make room or point us on our way toward fulfilling the early promise of America as a space of free interaction and inquiry. In examining their words in search of their utopian potential I am, in a way, attempting to contribute a verse to this unending project to realize a community grounded in freedom and care.

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[3] For a more generalized approach to the intellectual movement, I recommend Philip F. Gura's *American Transcendentalism: A History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2008) and Barbara Packer's *The Transcendentalists* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007). Robert D. Richardson has written two very thorough biographies: *Emerson: The Mind on Fire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) and *Henry David Thoreau: A Life of the Mind* (Berkeley: University of California, 1988), both of which are well worth one's time. Lastly, David S. Reynolds, *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography* (New York: Vintage, 1996) offers important contextualization to Whitman's writings against the general cultural milieu.

It must be acknowledged early on that it is not straight away apparent why we would consider these three from a philosophic perspective. Indeed, each of them had a strained relationship with philosophy at best. Emerson, with the incompressibility of his paragraphs, the irreducibility of the whole of his thought, is situated in a curious position within American intellectual culture. His status more than a century later still remains enigmatic; is he to be understood as an essayist? A public intellectual? A poet? Emerson saw himself as the latter: "I am in all my theory, politics, and ethics, a poet."[4] And yet, we do not remember Emerson for his poetic verse, but for his poetic thoughts, which is to say, for his philosophy. So to, Thoreau's relationship to philosophy was unclear. He writes in the early pages of *Walden*, "There are nowadays professors of philosophy, but not philosophers. Yet it is admirable to profess because it was once admirable to live."[5] At first blush, this slight against philosophy (or at least philosophy in its professionalized form) makes it appear as if Thoreau would prefer not to engage in this practice. Philosophy has been left to the systematizers and logicians; Thoreau, it seems, is after something altogether different in his stay at Walden Pond. And Whitman is no less skeptical of received traditions. As he writes in the preface to *Leaves of Grass*, "re-examine all you have been told at school or church or in any book, dismiss whatever insults your own soul."[6] Authority, whether intellectual or political, has no room in

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[4] Emerson, Ralph Waldo. *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson*. Ed. L. Rusk and Eleanor Tilton (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939). Letter from Emerson to his wife (3:18).
[5] Thoreau, *Walden*, 14.
[6] Whitman, "Preface 1855—Leaves of Grass, First Edition," in *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings*, ed. Michael Moon (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002), 622.

Whitman's reading of the world. These three are at best suspicious of the philosophical tradition and at worst hostile to it.

It is true that we might make our case by turning to an alternative set of thinkers, perhaps even staying with those we have already mentioned. However, our investigations of hermeneutics and ontology itself suggests these three thinkers. What I intend to show here is that Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman in some sense prefigured the hermeneutic turn in philosophy that is generally attributed to the twentieth century. Well before Derrida speaks of the impossibility of communication or Gadamer discloses the historicity of dwelling in the world, Emerson, Whitman, and Thoreau testify to the power of language and the need to think communication otherwise, though communication goes by other words. In their work we can see the germination of thinking communication as testimony, indeed at moments we nearly see it to fruition, as the standing out open to the responsibility of making sense in common. Furthermore, it is as a result of our readings of twentieth century philosophy that we are better situated to make much of the American thinkers that preceded them. Cornel West in *The American Evasion of Philosophy* echoes this concern for communication as well as a re-inheriting of this tradition, writing, "once one gives up on the search for foundations and the quest for certainty, human inquiry into truth and knowledge shifts to the social and communal circumstance under which persons can communicate and cooperate in the process of acquiring knowledge."[7] In West's terms, prophetic pragmatism—the impulse against systematization and abstraction that marks this intellectual movement—not only highlights the communal and communicative

[7] Cornel West, *The American Evasion of Philosophy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989), 213.

project of understanding-together, but politicizes this task. As we will see in our reading of these three, philosophy practiced in this way becomes an emancipatory experimentalism. Democracy becomes a creative act on the part of the entire citizenry and is not merely the prerogative of the elite.

Consequently, and despite their challenged position with respect to the history of philosophy, we shall treat them here as some of the finest philosophers we can imagine. If, as Charles Bakewell writes,

> to be a philosopher means to have a closely reasoned system of metaphysics, then doubtless Emerson [and we would add Thoreau and Whitman] was not a philosopher. But there is a far more general, and equally valid, sense in which we use the term philosophy, where it simply implies an attitude, whether reasoned, intuitive, or instinctive, toward *life as a whole*.[8]

Indeed, the very figures of Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman in their attitude toward life as a whole disclose a rift in our understanding of what constitutes philosophy. On the one hand, we have philosophy as a systematic discourse. Here, we do philosophy by comprehending and extending the history of philosophies, by examining philosophical discourse. We see whether the propositions cohere, the argument is sound, the system stable and generative of further theoretical insight. Contrary to this philosophy as system building, is this concern or attitude toward life as a whole as Bakewell describes, or what we have been calling with Hadot philosophy as a way of life.[9] Within this understanding, philosophy is an existential attitude fundamentally concerned with everyday life. If we

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[8] Charles M. Bakewell, "The Philosophy of Emerson," *The Philosophical Review* 12, no. 5 (September 1903), 525. Italics CB.
[9] Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1995).

draw our understanding of the philosopher not as one who builds systems of statements and propositions, but as one who promotes a way of life in accordance with loving wisdom, or, as Derrida claims, addresses the question philosophy came into existence to answer: "how to handle one's life and live well together," we are justified in considering Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman as philosophers. Although they offer no systematic worldview, they make manifest an attitude toward life as a whole.[10]

Throughout his work, contemporary philosopher Stanley Cavell has continuously claimed American philosophy has made no rigorous attempt to investigate Emerson and Thoreau's philosophic work. Although they are foundational figures in American history and intellectual culture, few are able to say much of their thought beyond the platitudes learned in secondary school: self-reliance, communion with nature, the values of sensuality. Cavell surmises,

> The moral to draw here may of course be … that Emerson and Thoreau are to be comprehended as philosophical amateurs, toward whom, it would be implied, there is no professional obligation. But suppose the better moral is that Emerson and Thoreau are as much threats, or say, embarrassments, to what we have learned to call philosophy.[11]

Let us make more of Cavell's insight. First, Emerson and Thoreau are belittled as amateurs and, consequently, unworthy of sustained professional obligation. It is as if they were not serious enough in being philosophers (though what, really, is more serious than

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[10] Jacques Derrida, "The Three Ages of Jacques Derrida," Interview with Kristine McKenna. *LA Weekly*, November 14, 2002.
[11] Stanley Cavell, *In Quest of the Ordinary* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 14.

the question of how one ought to live one's life?). On this all too common reading, their words though perhaps insightful for amateurs simply do not meet the criteria of philosophical work worthy of professional scholars. They lack the rigor of non-contradiction and systematic thinking. Nevertheless, the amateur, precluded from the province of professionalism, is embraced elsewhere. Recalling the root of the word, the amateur is someone who has a taste for something; she is a lover (L. *amatorem*, nom. *amator*, "lover,"). The amateur is the friend of philosophy as a way of life, one who has a taste for living well. Secondly, in what way are these writers ever a threat, let alone an embarrassment? What do their words put at risk? Cavell offers us an indication in his final clause: they were a threat to "what we have learned to call philosophy." Understood in this light, they were a threat to philosophy as it has come to be understood as a process of system-building and propositional analysis. It was not Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman who were an embarrassment to philosophy, rather they brought into relief the embarrassment that philosophy itself had become when it abandoned the quest of loving wisdom and guiding one towards living well.

Here again the word tells us more than we might suspect at first glance. To embarrass is to perplex or throw something into doubt. Indeed, in those moments when we are most embarrassed ourselves the locus of such suffering is that our understanding of our circumstance becomes perplexed or confounded. The everyday smoothness of our habitual affairs is disrupted and shown to be a matter more of chance and habit than genuine skill at living. In embarrassment, everything is out of place. From the root *embarras*, an obstacle, embarrassment impedes and calls into question the seeming ease with which our life carries on. It is in this sense that we might consider Emerson, Thoreau,

and Whitman's work an embarrassment to philosophy; they obstruct the worn-out understanding of philosophy and in this obstruction upend our habits of what counts as doing philosophy.

In this light, let us see them as philosophers of a particular sort. In his book *Senses of Walden*, Cavell claims Emerson and Thoreau (and again, let us always add Whitman here) are "philosophers of direction, orienters, tirelessly prompting us to be on our way, endlessly asking us where we stand, what it is we face."[12] The idea of direction and directionality cuts to the core of this project, as my discussion of the hyperbolic conditions of communication and being-in-the-world have attempted to bring into view. In the midst of what I have been calling a crisis of directionality, Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman offer us vistas upon which we might view new orientations, which is to say new habits of interpretation and action. We shall draw ourselves near to their most aphoristic statements so as to see what mysteries they bring to light. Indeed, their evasion of the systematic is itself an embracing of the aphoristic. We shall not make a series of dicta about their work, but try rather to allow ourselves to be open to what they have to say. Although Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman have been central to the development of American literary and intellectual culture, perhaps now their time has finally come to be heard as philosophers of testimony, which is to say, philosophers who give voice to the dwelling in the world that we are.

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[12] Stanley Cavell, *Senses of Walden* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 141-142.

5.2 Taking a Hint, or Emerson on Understanding

> For the return to the concrete and everlasting world
> what in fact I keep choosing
>
> are these words, these whispers, conversations
> from which time after time the truth breaks moist and green.
>
> Adrienne Rich, *Cartographies of Silence*

Whether as poet, essayist, or philosopher, Emerson remains difficult to read. His essays are notoriously challenging to hang together through any analytical framework. Indeed, the spontaneity that his work promotes is enacted throughout his texts through the weaving together of countless ideas across essays and speeches. One rarely has the sense that Emerson means or says anything exactly, but is instead offering hints and glimpses of a larger meaning that can only be approached indirectly. Perhaps the audience able to hear and see his words in their fullness remains to be constituted, or perhaps words themselves will never do more than approach and point to what is being circled around in such discourse. Along these lines, Gilles Deleuze in his essay "Literature and Life," takes up the relationship between writing and experience and offers us an approach to understanding Emerson, "To write is certainly not to impose a form (of expression) on the matter of lived experience…Writing is a question of becoming, always incomplete, always in the midst of being formed, and goes beyond the matter of any livable or lived experience."[13] In this respect, writing is not merely the transference of ideas or representations from one's mind to the page, but a dynamic process, an ever moving towards completion that can never be reached and which exceeds the bounds of one's

[13] Gilles Deleuze, "Literature and Life," in *Essays Critical and Clinical*. Translated by Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 1.

experience. Writing is, in its structure and practice, fragmentary. Writing is always on its way, never finished, even if we reach an end. Emerson knew this well, as did Thoreau and Whitman. Throughout his essays we find both an embracing of and frustration with this fragmentary force, one that Emerson seems to suggest is at the heart of being human and consequently at the center of understanding and thinking itself. For the sake of our interest in the philosophy of communication, we shall focus on three threads within Emerson's work: his call for openness and receptivity, the necessity of creativity, and the perpetual outward movement of thought and action. We shall do so toward dual ends: (1) to better understand Emerson's account of thinking/understanding in a manner that highlights its hyperbolic and hermeneutic character and (2) to provide textual resources for our description of communication as testimony.

We can approach Emerson's essays not only as works of cultural criticism, but as a reevaluation of the values of his time. The titles of his essays lend some credence to this reading strategy as among them we find: Prudence, Friendship, Heroism, Self-Reliance, Manners, Wealth, and others. Within these essays he often reads against the grain of the typical understanding of the idea under analysis and offers a reading of the virtue fitting to his time. Like Aristotle before him, Emerson writes to cultivate the characters of his audience and he attempts to speak to their better natures. There is one virtue, on my reading, that underlies them all: receptivity. Although no essay goes by that name, the idea of receptivity underwrites all of Emerson's thinking; human beings are receptive and they can live this receptivity in more or less virtuous ways. We are, I suspect, most familiar with Emerson's ideas regarding receptivity from his quite popular essay "The Over-Soul." There Emerson writes of human beings' relationship to mystery and

transcendence. He says of the process of thought, "I am a pensioner; not a cause but a surprised spectator of this ethereal water; that I desire and look up and put myself in the attitude of reception, but from some alien energy the visions come."[14] Thinking, although creative as we shall see, is not a form of production; rather, thinking means holding oneself open in an attitude receptive to thought. Thinking is an awaiting that has done the preparatory work such that a thought might arrive. Surely we have had some experience of this ourselves; for example, we feel stuck in our writing, trying too hard to come to the proper conclusion in a timely manner. Yet once we distance ourselves from our bad moods we find the idea we were looking for, but did not have in mind in advance, had arrived. We were inspired. For Emerson, the idea was breathed into us from afar and we are the organ through which thinking occurs. The Over-Soul, that "common heart" which all share, speaks to us in hints and indirection, modes of communication to which we must be attuned to receive their insights. In this sense, thinking is a kind of revelation. When we think we make manifest what has been revealed and announced to us from we know not exactly whence. Revelation is for Emerson "the disclosure of the soul."[15] We need not read this in a Christian spirit, though Emerson with his Unitarian predilections might have had that in mind. Instead, I suggest we instead approach it with the understanding of transcendence we developed in the previous chapter. What is revealed is not the soul per se, but language itself as the web of relations ranging across the ecstasies of time, which bears upon us and grants us the power of having something to say. Our common heart, then, is the language we have built together in common and within which

[14] Emerson, "The Over-Soul," 237.
[15] Emerson, "The Over-Soul," 244.

we dwell. Language is at the heart of understanding, granting both its possibility and its means. It is the way in which we bear the responsibility of responding to the call of making sense.

With respect to receptivity, Emerson makes much of one's tone. That we are receptive is an ontological fact, but the manner in which we are receptive is malleable. Tone, which I read as the manifestation of a mood, shapes the way in which we are receptive; our tone brings into relief this rather than that, these insights rather than those. As Emerson puts it rather cryptically, "the tone of seeking is one, and the tone of having is another."[16] He does not explicitly state which he considers to be greater, yet we have reason to believe (as we shall see later) that it is better to seek than to have. Emerson is simply pointing out what we take to be an ontological fact: how we hold ourselves open to the world determines in many ways what we take the world to be. Enthusiasm then becomes paramount as a tone of living. He writes in "Circles," "The way of life is wonderful; it is by abandonment."[17] To live one's life with abandon, open to all that might come, is the mark of a hyperbolic magnanimity.

Emerson gives us a figure through which to understand receptivity: the poet. The poet, that lover of language, acquaints us not with her skill or her wealth of knowledge, but apprises us of the "common wealth."[18] That is to say, the poet speaks truly (though not always accurately) from out of our shared linguistic powers. The poet is balanced both in her reception of the world and her ability to put it into words. In his essay "The Poet" Emerson draws a distinction between three representatives of being, all equal with

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[16] Emerson, "The Over-Soul," 246.
[17] Emerson, "Circles," 262.
[18] Emerson, "The Poet," 288.

one another: the Knower, the Doer, and the Sayer. Whereas the Knower loves truth and the Doer good, the Sayer loves beauty. The poet, as Sayer, gives voice to the world and discloses its beauty. The poet is representative and receptive, giving expression to that which would otherwise be mute. Importantly, however, the poet is not necessarily inventive, but from her talent and receptive nature, is open to the world and voices what stands forth to be said. "Poetry was all written before time was," Emerson writes, "we hear those primal warblings and attempt to write them down, but we lose ever and anon a word or a verse and substitute something of our own, and thus miswrite the poem."[19] Speaking poetically, testifying, is the attempt (and always ever an attempt) to capture the uncapturable. In hearing the warblings amiss, the poem becomes one's own—it gains the mark of creativity. The poem that was the world was miswritten, yes, but as a result we gain a remarkable insight. It is the only world we have. The failure of perfect match between poem and poet gives us something beautiful. Thus "the world seems always waiting for its poet."[20] The poet receives and announces, unfolding a new beautiful thought and experience. The world always awaits its poet because it is poetry that brings forward the world.

We are all poets. A poem has nothing to do with a particular literary genre: "it is not metres, but a metre-making argument that makes a poem."[21] Poetry is passionate thought. Poetry gives voice to the receptivity that we are. Emerson tells us "We stand before the secret of the world, there where Being passes into Appearance and Unity into

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[19] Emerson, "The Poet," 290.
[20] Emerson, "The Poet," 291.
[21] Emerson, "The Poet," 290.

Variety."[22] Any experience, regardless of how minimal it might appear, is sufficiently rich for poetry. All words illuminate this there where Being passes into Appearance, the there that we ourselves are. As poets we are intoxicated by words and by the responsibility of our shared being-together ecstatically. Our task then is to give ourselves over with abandon to this intoxication, to release ourselves to it, so as to make sense of our dwelling in the world. When Emerson declares that "Every word was once a poem. Every new relation is a new word" he is pointing to the continual movement of language with its flows and fluxes.[23] The word, with its history, harkens to a prior poem, a prior insight into the world that has solidified and become shorthand. When we examine words we find the fossils of a language that although it came before us it is nevertheless something to we belong. In short, the poet, which is to say we, liberate the world by standing exposed, with abandon, and bearing witness to it.

This understanding of radical openness and receptivity moves us to our second major theme or Emersonian virtue: movement and fragmentation. Emerson has no patience for the stale and the static as they preclude the vitality of human beings as receptive, creative creatures. His concern for movement is demonstrated predominantly in two essays, "Experience" and "Circles." We shall begin here with "Experience" as it is the most well-known of the two. Although Emerson is typically described as an idealist due to his focus on genius and mind, as seen primarily through his conception of the Over-Soul, in "Experience" Emerson undertakes an experiment in empiricism. He attempts therein to say something about "Illusion, Temperament, Succession, Surface,

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[22] Emerson, "The Poet," 293.
[23] Emerson, "The Poet," 294-295.

Surprise, Reality, Subjectiveness…I dare not assume to give their order, but I name them as I find them in my way."[24] He does not know from the start where his inquiries will lead, but he sets off on a line of thinking to see what may occur. He lets the movement of his ideas be his guide. Indeed, he begins the essay with the quintessential question of empiricism and phenomenology: "Where do we find ourselves?" He continues,

> In a series of which we do not know the extremes, and believe it has none. We wake and find ourselves on a stair; there are stairs below us, which we seem to have ascended; there are stairs above us, many a one, which go upward and out of sight. But the Genius which according to the old belief stands at the door by which we enter, and gives us lethe to drink, that we may tell no tales, mixed the cup to strongly, and we cannot shake off the lethargy now at noonday.[25]

In other words, we find ourselves here and now, having sojourned in the world thus far and with untold, unforeseen, and incalculable possibilities before us. Shaped by both the past and the projection of the future, we find ourselves here, and lethargic. We know not whence we came nor where we are headed with any detail, as "all things swim and glitter."[26] Such is our lot in life on Emerson's account, to be perpetually on our way tenuous in where we are going and just what it is we might be doing. Moreover, the confusion of what it is we are doing is further compounded because there are forces, impulses, and drives pushing us forward and pulling us back, sending us this way rather than that, despite what we may or may not will. For Emerson the will has little to do with

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[24] Emerson, "Experience," in *Selected Writings*, Modern Library Edition (New York: Random House, 1992), 325.
[25] Emerson, "Experience," 307.
[26] Emerson, "Experience," 307.

our experience. Indeed, we can see within his writing itself a contest of forces struggling to say something. Emerson himself has an ambivalence suffused into the core of his thinking in this essay; we find a sort of undecideability, a saying of one thing inextricably linked to a saying and desiring of something else. Said differently, although written by the singular figure of Emerson, "Experience" is composed of a multiplicity of voices all seeking to be heard. It is my contention here that not only is this the case for Emerson in this specific essay, but this multiplicity is at the core of speaking and writing itself. It is at the core of experience and understanding.

In this respect, Emerson is a philosopher worthy study as he is a thinker caught in the in-between, always in the process of becoming. Emerson is always on his way. Returning to the image of the stairs, we can ask, between what is Emerson situated? Said differently, what is behind him in his thinking and what lies before him? Where is he going? I wish to argue here that Emerson is caught between two conceptions of thinking, and consequently understanding.

On the one hand, there is the dominant image of thought grounding Emerson's time; he cannot help but desire the universality and transparency of thinking. Throughout "Experience" he is deeply concerned with the forces that divert one from the truth: "Dream delivers us to dream, and there is no end to illusion. Life is a train of moods like a string of beads, and as we pass through them they prove to be many-colored lenses which paint the world their own hue, and each shows only what lies in its focus."[27] In our moving through life we attempt to find reality, "the sharp peaks and edges of truth," but they remain elusive. Even the most certain of experiences—death—provides little by way

[27] Emerson, "Experience," 309.

of accessing truth. Many have taken great offense by Emerson's seeming dismissal of grief and death. In particular, the following passage:

> The only thing grief has taught me is to know how shallow it is…In the death of my son, now more than two years ago, I seem to have lost a beautiful estate—no more. I cannot get it nearer to me…it does not touch me; something which I fancied was a part of me, which could not be torn away without tearing me nor enlarged without enriching me, falls off from me and leaves no scare. It was caduceus. I grieve that grief can teach me nothing, nor carry me one step into real nature.[28]

There are many ways we can read this insight. We might find this a callous denial of grieving for his deceased son Waldo. A charitable reading on this score would be to claim he is so overtaken with grief that he is unable to express it. These readings, in addition to psychologizing the text, fail to see what Emerson might be getting at philosophically. Emerson shows grief holds no special insights, death teaches us no more than living does. Death moves us not. In this sense, Emerson affirms a philosophy of life. As much as we might strive for a sense of solidity to our being here, none is offered, not even the certainty of when our death will arrive. He concludes, even with a touch of melancholy, "I take this evanescence and lubricity of all objects, which lets them slip through our fingers then when we clutch hardest, to be the most unhandsome part of our condition."[29] He laments this unhandsome condition but nevertheless brings it into relief. He describes experience as he sees it, despite hinting at a wish it might be otherwise.

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[28] Emerson, "Experience," 309.
[29] Emerson, "Experience," 309.

On the other hand, and despite his lament over the dissipation of any transparency or universality to thinking, we find gestures toward a new understanding. We see this most clearly within two movements in Emerson's essay: (1) his focus on mood over rationality and (2) his critique of the "impudent knowingness" of his time. Emerson's "Experience" is foremost an experiment in traversing the spaces between ideas and seeing where they might lead, should we follow them. In other words, it traces out the movements of understanding.

First, Emerson confronts and rebukes the idea that we have direct access to reality and the truth. For Emerson, experience is always already mediated through the having of a mood. As we made note of earlier, "Life is a train of moods like a string of beads," and it is through these moods that the world discloses itself to us. The process of perception shapes reality. This string of moods is strung on the iron wire of temperament. But temperament, too, is not stable with any hard degree of certainty. As Emerson notes, "Temperament also enters fully into the system of illusions and shuts us in a prison of glass which we cannot see."[30] There seems to be a morose finality to all of this, as temperament "prevails over everything of time, place and condition."[31] Emerson takes on a tone of regret for always being in a mood, for having the world disclosed to us in a form mediated by our state of mind. In this respect, he seems to fall prey to the dominant image of thought that we are diverted from the truth by forces that are outside us, or at least outside our pure consciousness (i.e., our mood). And yet, things are never so simple with Emerson. Although he appears to regret this weakness in the human condition, he

[30] Emerson, "Experience," 310.
[31] Emerson, "Experience," 310.

marks the illusoriness of moods as a necessity. He continues, "Our love of the real draws us to permanence, but health of the body consists in circulation, and sanity of the mind in variety or facility of association…Dedication to one thought is quickly odious."[32] In other words, although we may desire permanence, we need variety of both body and spirit (here he demonstrates a very close affinity to Whitman's poetry). Life requires an elasticity that wards off immobility and stasis. Human being for Emerson is profoundly dynamic: "Man lives by pulses; our organic movements are such; and the chemical and ethereal agents are undulatory and alternate; and the mind goes antagonizing on, and never prospers but by fits."[33] The stasis of permanence, although a wish, is a deadly one. This elasticity is the directionality and momentum that life requires.

This focus on perception and experience as imbued and made possible through the having of a mood leads Emerson to critique all attempts at calculation and method as a way to understand reality or truth. The "mental proclivity of the physicians" and the "chuckle of the phrenologists," who would have heard Emerson's words with mere amusement as they believe themselves to have access to temperament and mood with methodological certainty are "theoretic kidnappers and slave-drivers" of his time. His distaste for those who attempt to reduce access to the miracle of human being to a methodological program is palpable:

> They esteem each man the victim of another, who winds him round his finger by knowing the law of his being; and, by such cheap signboards as the color of his

[32] Emerson, "Experience," 312.
[33] Emerson, "Experience," 318.

> beard or the slope of his occiput, reads the inventory of his fortunes and character. The grossest ignorance does not disgust like this impudent knowingness.[34]

Better to know nothing than to believe that such crass methodology is knowledge. No method, no calculation, will get at the heart of what it means to be human and experience being in the world. He notes, "Nature hates calculators; her methods are saltatory and impulsive."[35] Said otherwise, we are, as manifestations of Nature, moved by impulses and drives, hops and leaps. We are driven by a locomotion that proceeds in all directions; we are hyperbolic. The attempt to narrow these lines of movement, this excess of experience, to a singular, knowable path is not only profoundly arrogant, it goes against the very condition of human being. As with our moods, we need a variety of experience. Importantly, this variety of experience does not mean one must travel throughout the world or collect as many experiences as possible. On the contrary, such variety comes not from movement but from intensity. It is not a question of going anywhere, but of genuinely experiencing where one is in its fullest potential, following possibilities where they lead. The very value of life, on Emerson's account, lies "in its inscrutable possibilities; in the fact that I never know, in addressing myself to a new individual, what may befall me."[36] We need not venture far, the everyday experience of life itself and of being surrounded by others who engage us is all the adventure we need. In every communicative encounter there is the unforeseeable possibility that we will be moved in a direction we know not whence.

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[34] Emerson, "Experience," 311.
[35] Emerson, "Experience," 318.
[36] Emerson, "Experience," 311.

The perpetual movement of experience is intensified and broadened in "Circles." There Emerson points to the hyperbole at the center of being in the world. The circle, he believes, is the cipher of the world. We see it everywhere in nature, from the eye to globe. We move from circle to circle, from one understanding and context to the next—there is a "circular or compensatory character of every human action."[37] Furthermore, and more to the reading of testimony we are providing here, "Every action admits of being outdone. Our life is an apprenticeship to the truth that around every circle another can be drawn; that there is no end in nature, but every end is a beginning; that there is always another dawn risen on mid-noon, and under every deep a lower deep opens."[38] Said otherwise, acknowledging our testimonial comportment means acknowledging this fact: we are always beginning, always on our way. Every action can be outdone and encompassed within another series of actions. Emerson writes, "Permanence is but a word of degrees;" moreover, permanence only appears as such from within our finite perspective.[39] Everything is at risk as a result; nothing is permanent or ultimate, nothing is safe-guarded from being worked upon. Emerson, who still believed in progress, sees progress as this movement. "Every ultimate fact is only the first of a new series."[40] That is, everything admits of being a beginning.

We are never outside of our circles in full, but we are able to twist-a-way from within them. Such is the task of art and creativity, our third major theme. Emerson returns to the Sayer or poet and writes, "Literature is a point outside of our hodiernal circle

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[37] Emerson, "Circles," 252.
[38] Emerson, "Circles," 252.
[39] Emerson, "Circles," 252.
[40] Emerson, "Circles," 254.

through which a new one may be described."[41] Literature gives us the distance necessary to see our position in this endless movement anew. To the poet, to those who dwell with words and images, all is new as if voiced for the first time. The Sayer undertakes a continual experiment; she is an endless seeker who aims to give voice to the world and who knows always that her voice can be outdone.

Creativity becomes the marker for Emerson of thinking about thought otherwise. He writes, "Did our birth fall in some fit of indigence and frugality in nature, that she [Nature] was so sparing of her fire and so liberal of her earth that it appears to us that we lack the affirmative principle, and though we have health and reason, yet we have no superfluity of spirit for new creation?"[42] We have reason enough, indeed exploring reason further might well be a continuation of the dominant image of thought. What we need, Emerson believes, is the spirit for creation, the impulse necessary to bring anything new into the world. This, and not the process of mental representations, is what thinking is. Returning to our discussion of receptivity, thinking becomes an active receiving of a gift from the world that allows something new be witnessed and brought forth in the sharing out of words. In one of the most beautiful passages of his work, Emerson puts it this way, "But every insight from this realm of thought is felt as initial, and promises a sequel. I do not make it; I arrive there, and behold what was there already. I make! O no! I clap my hands in infantine joy and amazement before the first opening to me of this august magnificence."[43] The spirit of creativity is the making oneself ready, the preparation for, the presencing of something new. Emerson is advocating a holding-

[41] Emerson, "Circles," 257.
[42] Emerson, "Experience," 307.
[43] Emerson, "Experience," 320.

oneself-open or radical exposure to the world such that one might receive its insights and further share them with those who are ready to hear. We might take Emerson's essay itself as a testimony to his receiving of insights, and his attempt to weave those experiences into words that can be let loose upon the world. This understanding of thinking and writing is profoundly different from the dominant image of thought for his time—he is on the verge of saying something new. Given the stronghold this dominant image of thought still holds on philosophy, it might well be that he is writing for an audience that has yet to come. Although Emerson's lectures and essays were without doubt popular and garnered large audiences, one wonders if their ears were ready for his words. Is not the declaration of Emerson's philosophy as unworthy of professional obligation an indication that our ears are still stopped?

Moreover, Emerson writes "Experience" as an essay and not as a poem. If we take seriously that the genre of a piece is essential to its meaning, then there is something to be made of this occurrence. An essay, from the French *essai*, is an attempt, a trial, an experiment. Emerson is not offering a systematic discourse of any sort, but an attempt, a reaching out into the world that tries to say something. Said otherwise, we can see him taking himself at his word (or persuading himself of his word) by enacting in his writing the very attitude and way of life he is promoting.[44] The focus on mood, vitality, and creativity is enacted within the structure of the essay wherein we can witness his moods

[44] I add "persuading himself of his word" because I have a suspicion, unable to be developed here, that Emerson writes as a form of spiritual exercise and as a way of committing himself to an understanding that he does not fully embody. Such a hypothesis would be one way of explaining the various shifts in tone—from melancholy to exuberance—throughout his work.

change, his ideas transform, and his thinking become suffused with a gratitude for insights having being given and shared.

As an attempt or trial, Emerson makes clear time and again the tentativeness and hesitation behind every word. He points to the limitation of his thoughts, the way in which regardless of rigor or precision—though they certainly matter—his words will fall short of encompassing his experience. Try as he might, he cannot communicate the fullness of the world as experienced. All names and words are "quaint" and "narrow." That which makes thinking and creativity possible, the flux of moods that point to "that in us which changes not," is ineffable and refuses to be named. Emerson can report the hints, offer glimpses, or use profane words when sacred are not available, but the impulse of experience refuses to be named and pinned down. Although Emerson cannot communicate in full the experience of being in the world, he continually testifies, knowing all the while there will never be a final word on the matter.

We even witness the movements of intensity through the section breaks within his essay. Such breaks, unnamed and unmarked, demonstrate the spinning out of his ideas and the necessity of beginning again differently and following a new line of understanding. Each section of the essay appears a perspectival bead strung along the wire of experience. In an 1838 letter to his friend Thomas Carlyle, Emerson gets at this, writing, "Here I sit & read & write with very little system & as far as regards composition, with the most fragmentary result: paragraphs incompressible each sentence an infinitely repellent particle."[45] Emerson makes no promises and offers little if any clarity. Rather,

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[45] Ralph Waldo Emerson, *The Correspondence of Emerson and Carlyle*. Ed. Joseph Slater, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), 185.

he explores the vicissitudes of experience, tracing out some and leaving behind others, in an attempt to say something meaningful. And yet, he is making an attempt at the impossible; he is on his own account saying something about which we can never speak clearly or with exactitude. Every paragraph, sentence, or word, is a fragment of experience itself and experience necessarily exceeds the bounds of what is sayable. In this respect, even the most complete thoughts of Emerson's are fragmentary through and through. And it could not be otherwise. Thus he declares to his readers, "I am a fragment, and this is a fragment of me."[46] Experience is forces and flows in flux, unable to be stopped but for a moment when they will inevitably slip from our grasp.

5.3 Living Without Bounds, or Thoreau on Hermeneutic Dwelling

> How long does it take to make the woods?
> As long as it takes to make the world.
>
> Wendell Berry, *A Timbered Choir*

Every few years, interest in Henry David Thoreau is renewed through popular magazines and academic debates about his significance to the American literary and political tradition. Most recently, Kathryn Schulz offered a scathing critique of Thoreau's scholarly value in her *New Yorker* article "Pond Scum."[47] The title alone sets the tone, but Schulz's general argument is that Thoreau is morally myopic: a narcissist who demands of others an unsustainable ethic, who thinks a solitary inward life is all that matters (in distinction to, for example, one's relationships with other people). In a claim characteristic of the entire essay, she writes "*Walden* is less a cornerstone work of environmental literature than the original cabin porn: a fantasy about rustic life divorced

[46] Emerson, "Experience," 325.
[47] Kathryn Schulz, "Pond Scum," *New Yorker*, October 19, 2015, 40-45.

from the reality of living in the woods, and, especially, a fantasy about escaping the entanglements and responsibilities of living among other people."[48] Schulz even goes so far as to compare Thoreau to Ayn Rand claiming each are fanatics of individualism. Although we should always be wary of raising a single individual into a national literary hero, and we should admit Thoreau was at least something of a curmudgeon, Schulz's reading is profoundly uncharitable and lacks the hermeneutic sophistication necessary to be a genuine source of scholarship. She fails to examine with any depth the meaning that underlies Thoreau's words, focusing instead on only what is immediately apparent. At times I wonder if Schulz and I have read the same *Walden*, as it is a text as deep as the ponds Thoreau resided by. Read with a careful eye, which we shall have here, *Walden* is, first and foremost a treatise on learning to live with and among other people. Moreover, it is an essay on dwelling in the truth of world disclosure. To this end, it is a text that contributes to a philosophy of communication.

Walden begins with a familiar literary trope, the author's justification for the words that follow. It is a writer who went to Walden Pond and a story that returned. Townspeople, upon hearing about his experiment in the woods, wanted to know how Thoreau was able to get on as he did (what did he eat? was he afraid? etc.); consequently, he penned a response so as to avoid repeating his answers to each curious passerby. In his telling, Thoreau came to Walden Pond so that he might learn how to live: "I went to the woods because I wished to live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life, and see if I could not learn what it had to teach, and not, when I came to die, discover that I

[48] Schulz, "Pond Scum," 40-41.

had not lived."[49] And he left as easily as he had arrived, having learned from his experiment and wishing to undergo another before his finite time was ended. Although *Walden*, and Thoreau's writing more generally, has cemented its place in the American literary tradition as a kind of proto-environmentalism (which Schulz notes but immediately dismisses), focusing only on Thoreau's communion with nature overlooks the larger impetus of the work. *Walden* is a philosophic tract par excellence. It constructs no system to be sure, yet it raises questions most central to existence and being-with others; as so many of the thinkers we have examined in this project overall, Thoreau contributes to the practice of philosophy as a way of life. I wish to offer one reading of *Walden* in particular, one that gets at the significance of being-together with other people and the world. Although Thoreau poses a variety of quite pointed questions to his readers, I will argue here that the text has one central question at its core, one he raises near the mid-point of *Walden*: "What do we want to dwell most near to?"[50]

The question of one's dwelling is at the crux of Thoreau's insights and concerns. Furthermore, where and how one dwells is intertwined with how and with whom one communicates. On a cursory reading it is obvious that he his writing about building his home—the entirety of the first chapter, "Economy," lists all that was necessary for him to undertake such a task, from boards to screws and nails. However, to focus only on the accounting and budgeting that frames Thoreau's experiment is to fail to grasp just what is being taken into account. He is not merely balancing his expenses against his gains (though he does purposively demonstrate that it was not as burdensome to build his home

[49] Thoreau, *Walden*, 86.
[50] Thoreau, *Walden*, 126.

as his detractors proclaimed), but he is bringing into view how one must take an account for how one lives one's life. Living is the spending of one's time, a time finite through and though and thus for Thoreau it matters how time is spent and who it is spent with. As he puts it, "in any weather, and any hour of the day or night, I have been anxious to improve the nick of time, and notch it on my stick too."[51] Not only does he wish to improve his time, but also to "notch it on [his] stick," to record it. The words offered about his time at Walden Pond are the notches marked in hopes that they might assist in improving the time of others. From the very start this text has a sense of community at its core; it is an experiment published (i.e., shared) with others in the hopes that they might find similar results through their own methods. As he goes on later in *Walden* to say, the greatest aesthetic achievement is not any of the fine arts, but the ability to sculpt the very atmosphere of one's being with good deeds. Living well is the highest art and that toward which all can aspire and cultivate a talent. Thoreau's words clarify an experiment, an aesthetic experiment, which is to say an experiment in ethics, with how he spent his time—it gives an account of whether such spending was worthwhile—it does not give a mandate for what others ought to do with theirs. For as judged as one might feel upon reading the text he offers no moral mandates. He asks only that others experiment with their own lives, put it under the weight of a trial, and ask whether it is worth living in the manner you have chosen (which demands, of course, you acknowledge the choices you have made). As an experiment, Thoreau's time at Walden Pond risks the possibility of failure, but what will not fail are the insights gleaned from his time there. Moreover, as an aesthetic experiment Thoreau, like Emerson with the poet before him, believes we can

[51] Thoreau, *Walden*, 16.

all be artists of some kind because we already are on a more elemental level. This task requires not a concrete artistic skill, but a sense of good taste—a taste for what is beautiful to life and what is not. In order to develop this practice one must make an account of the way in which one dwells.

In raising the question "What do we want to dwell most near to?" Thoreau is asking, around what, or in the midst of what, do we wish to spend our lives. What Thoreau wants, above all, is not to dwell absent other people alone in the woods with only animals to converse with—a misreading so predominant that it is reckless—but to dwell with others who acknowledge the responsibility of having to make one's own life. In other words, the writer at Walden Pond wants to live among those who face the world with wakefulness. The idea of wakefulness, morning, and somnolence weigh heavily throughout the text. "To be awake is to be alive," Thoreau writes, "I have never yet met a man who was quite awake. How could I have looked him in the face?"[52] Wakefulness marks the ability to better each moment in the notches of time, to live each moment to the fullest, to risk slipping into a kind of pop psychology banality. Along similar lines as Emerson, wakefulness is a radical openness to the world, an openness cultivated through the making oneself ready for what is to come. For our purposes, to be awake is to see beyond the ordinariness of our habituated responses to the world and see opportunities for twisting-a-way. Wakefulness is the acknowledgement of our hyperbolic condition. In this sense, *Walden* has a messianic tone to it, the tone of seeking about which Emerson speaks. The writer at Walden Pond seeks for another, one who is more awake than he, for a community of others with whom he can share his time. And in this seeking he greets

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[52] Thoreau, *Walden*, 85.

every other as one who might possibly be awake. Said in a more philosophically inflected vocabulary, he greets every other as the radically other that they are. Communicative ethics, whatever else it might be, must take the other as someone with whom we can make meaning and with whom we can with-stand the ek-stases of dwelling in the world.

Just as *Walden* is not merely a proto-environmentalist manifesto, neither is it a treatise on self-reliance. It is a mistake to think Thoreau wished to escape the company of others or that he saw no value in relationships. To the contrary, we must read Thoreau's description of dwelling in nature in at least two ways. First, we must take his words at face value as he presents them—Thoreau is indeed discussing ways in which one can live harmoniously with one's natural surroundings. After all, *Walden* is a critique of the rise of modernity in Thoreau's world and a call for the necessity of harmony with both natural and technological objects. Second, however, he makes it quite clear in his discussion of his solitude in nature that he is being allegorical. Every sentence, deliberate to be sure, means more than it seems. Said otherwise, every sentence testifies to multiple experiences. Like the ponds whose depth is more than it appears, so too with the words of *Walden*. For example, when he writes of his bean-field he spins tales about the inner workings of what surrounds him. On the one hand, yes, of course Thoreau is discussing how he cultivated his field and how he was able to grow enough for sustenance. On the other hand, however, the bean field is about more than this. "Perchance some must work in fields if only for the sake of tropes and expression, to serve a parable maker one day," Thoreau writes hinting that he is indeed that parable maker, a sharer of both wit and

wisdom.[53] We would do well to remember that *Walden* is as much about writing and reading as it is about living in the woods, if only we open ourselves up to the text. Thoreau claims that "The works of the great poets have never yet been read by mankind, for only great poets can read them," we might say the same of *Walden* as well—the text sings forth to the degree that we allow it to say something to our ears.[54] To be sure, this is a capacity we all have would we only put ourselves to the hard work of learning to listen. Listening means not only a hearing of words, but simultaneously an openness to the context within which they are said. Writing or understanding poems—which is to say, speaking and understanding language—requires a hermeneutic approach to communication.

Let us take as an example of Thoreau's hermeneutic complexity the passage wherein he describes building a chimney for his home. This passage speaks doubly: first as an example of the intricacy of Thoreau's writing and secondly as another way of articulating the hermeneutic approach to communication we have been supporting throughout this project. He tells the reader,

> When I came to build my chimney I studied masonry. My bricks, being second-hand ones, required to be cleaned with a trowel, so that I learned more than usual of the qualities of bricks and trowels. The mortar on them was fifty years old, and was said to be still growing harder […] Many of the villages of Mesopotamia are built of second-hand bricks of a very good quality, obtained from the ruins of Babylon, and the cement on them is older and probably harder still […] As my

[53] Thoreau, *Walden*, 152.
[54] Thoreau, *Walden*, 98.

> bricks had been in a chimney before, though I did not read the names of Nebuchadnezzar on them, I picked out as many fireplace bricks as I could find, to save work and waste, I filled the spaces between the bricks about the fireplace with stones from the pond shore, and also made my mortar with the white sand from the same place […] I was pleased to see my work rising so square and solid by degrees, and reflected, that, if it proceeded slowly, it was calculated to endure a long time.[55]

There are multiple readings we could develop from this short passage, layer upon layer of meaning rests atop each other. On the one hand, he is literally describing the process he took to build his chimney: the acquisition of materials, the skills of labor, and the pleasure brought forth by a completed work. Even with this rudimentary reading it is clear that Thoreau strongly relies on others, those who provided him the necessary bricks to get started and the knowledge to undertake the project in the first place. In this reading Thoreau does not make the mistake of fetishizing either labor nor material goods.

Yet Thoreau is always saying more than one thing at a time, each sentence functions within a multiplicity of registers and resonates different meanings depending on how we are attuned to listen. So too, then, is this recounting a parable about dwelling and inheriting one's tradition. The chimney we can read here as Thoreau's own understanding and writing, and the bricks other texts (broadly thought) which he has encountered. His understanding of the texts with which he finds himself—the received tradition so to speak, which is able to be received *only* by interpretation—must be appropriated as his own, they must "be cleaned with a trowel." That is to say, they must be examined and taken up

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[55] Thoreau, *Walden*, 226-227.

with care. The prior readings of such texts are old, they have become habitual and increasingly sedimented, but one must look at them anew. To these newly understood standard meanings, Thoreau acknowledges the inventiveness of one's own interpretation: he gathers stones from the shore of Walden Pond and mixes his own mortar. That is to say, he takes something from his own experience and combines it with the tradition he has come to understand. What is more intersubjective—that is, what is a clearer indication of embracing one's always dwelling together with others—than this acknowledgement of always having to be within a tradition and from within this space the cultivation of one's appropriation?

Here Thoreau echoes the insights we learned from Gadamer. The tradition is something within which we consistently are, indeed, it is who we are as the active appropriation of it through interpretation. The tradition, the force of history, propels us into the future and gives us the materials with which we make meaning of our world. Through a receptivity to the tradition we are able to generate creatively something new. Furthermore, taking up and preserving the tradition—as Thoreau does here by incorporating borrowed bricks—is an act of freedom. The critical lesson that hermeneutics teaches us is not that we must abandon tradition for the sake of progress. On the contrary, we must take up the tradition and re-fashion it (preserve these elements rather than those, rework this but not that) in a manner fitting to our own circumstances. Such is the communicative task we perpetually face: being receptive to the tradition and hermeneutic situation within which we are and creatively generating a response that attends to the circumstances of our time.

The creative generation of a response to our worldly circumstances, as our hermeneutic task, is caught up in the practice of reading. We must learn not only how to read a book, but how to read the world. With a little more practice and courageous determination, Thoreau writes, we might all become "essentially students and observers" who can properly read. Reading is more than the learning of one's ABCs, indeed for Thoreau it is among the highest task; there are few who can read. The work that goes into reading parallels in difficulty the work of writing. Furthermore, we cannot underestimate the power of reading. Thoreau writes, "There are probably words addressed to our condition exactly, which, if we could really hear and understand, would be more salutary than the morning or the spring to our lives, and possibly put a new aspect on the face of things for us."[56] Reading, as reception, discloses the power words have to reveal the world anew.

Perhaps the greatest lesson Thoreau offers is not a particular insight from his time at Walden Pond. Not the building of his home, his encounters with loons and woodchucks, his bean field, or the conversations with his neighbors. Instead, and before all of this, he offers a lesson in the telling of a tale as such. Thoreau recognizes that he has something to say and that he has to say something. He is compelled to share his experiences because they have given a force to his life. He writes, with questionable lament, "unfortunately, I am confined to this theme by the narrowness of my experience."[57] Thoreau knows that regardless of the content of his experiences he must share them. It is by a mixture of happenstance and choice, then, that these are the

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[56] Thoreau, *Walden*, 102.
[57] Thoreau, *Walden*, 3.

experiences he has to share. This impulse to speak, and to speak truly (that is, in accordance with one's experience of the world) is woven throughout *Walden*. However, this impulse to speak is tempered by the understanding that his words will never capture the entirety of his experiences. Consequently, he uses words which bring into view, like Emerson, the fragmentary nature of his language. Phrases such as "If I should attempt to tell…"[58] "I will only hint at some of the enterprises which I have cherished,"[59] "I would fain to say something,"[60] all highlight the hesitation of his language. Nevertheless, he is "convinced, both by faith and experience" and consequently must put into words the experiences he knows cannot be explained fully enough.[61] His hesitation is gives no indication of a lack of conviction, it points instead to the unerring strength of his commitments.

This returns us to testimony. All communicative acts, from the most basic to the most complex risk fragmentation because they rest upon a kind of faith. To respond to another is to promise in return (*re-* 'back,' *spondere-* 'promise'); it is an obligation. A promise begins every communicative event—I promise to tell the truth. Structurally, a communicative event begins with each asking the other "believe and trust me" rather than the declaration that one knows with certainty what they are going to share with the other. In testifying, the other comes upon us as if a surprise and we do not know immediately how this new relation must be negotiated. Dwelling in the world together is a matter of faith. We are always already with others and in this condition we are faithful regardless

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[58] Thoreau, *Walden*, 16.
[59] Thoreau, *Walden*, 16.
[60] Thoreau, *Walden*, 4.
[61] Thoreau, *Walden*, 67.

of our habituated faithlessness. It is this faithlessness, I have argued, that Thoreau helps us recognize and overcome. To become wakeful, open and receptive, is to take up one's faith.

Part of this faithfulness is the acknowledgement of limitations, the boundaries which in our hyperbolic moments we attempt to move beyond. Moreover, testimony is the possible manifestation of communication which is itself an impossibility. When we testify we tell impossible words. That communication always entails a lack is not a deficiency but rather its saving power. Thoreau writes,

> The volatile truth of our words should continually betray the inadequacy of the residual statement. Their truth is instantly translated; its literal monument alone remains. The words which express our faith and piety are not definite; yet they are significant and fragrant like frankincense to superior natures.[62]

Indeed, because there can be no final word and thus the task of communicating is never complete, certainty can never be reached once and for all. From this standpoint, possibility is never entirely closed from us; from within the structure of communication understood as testimony resides the space where new possibilities emerge and call to be actualized. Our words are fragrant and linger, they have weight in the world but remain indefinite. This is their virtue, for in their indefiniteness we will never have said enough. The truth of our words must continually be said anew.

Thoreau fully embraces this hyperbolic character and I suggest we come to acknowledge it as well. Words are the atmosphere in which we breathe, but not all of us are attuned to this insight. Thoreau worries, not that he is unable to find words to say, but

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[62] Thoreau, *Walden*, 304.

rather that those words will fit together too tightly, be too precise in a way that is unfaithful to his experience. In what I consider among the most beautiful passages of *Walden*, he illuminates what I am attempting to conceptualize as testimony:

> I fear chiefly lest my expression may not be *extra-vagant* enough, may not wander far enough beyond the narrow limits of my daily experience, so as to be adequate to the truth of which I have been convinced. *Extra vagance*! It depends on how you are yarded. The migrating buffalo, which seeks new pastures in another latitude, is not extravagant like the cow which kicks over the pail, leaps the cowyard fence, and runs after her calf, in milking time. I desire to speak somewhere *without* bounds; like a man in a waking moment, to men in their waking moments; for I am convinced that I cannot exaggerate enough even to lay the foundation of a true expression.[63]

It is extravagance then, an abundance of language, that comes closest to the truth. Precision here is the enemy for the more precise we are the more we limit the significance of the experience. This is not to say that more words are always preferable to fewer, but that the words themselves must continue to remain open and translatable, hermeneutically fluid. We must have the nature for this, as Thoreau notes in comparing the buffalo to the barnyard cow. Is not this nature the hyperbolic condition of being in the world? When we exaggerate, when we tell lies (or what would be lies if we take correctness as our measure), we are, for Thoreau, getting closer to the truth that we can never fully speak because we are never able to speak without bounds. The buffalo already has the ability to roam, but we, the barnyard cow sink further and further into utility and

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[63] Thoreau, *Walden*, 304. [Italics HDT].

efficiency, modes of interpretation which shape how we are yarded. In the narrowed horizons of understanding what is needed now more than ever is the ability to be extravagant. In such a world as ours we cannot possibly exaggerate enough to speak beyond the confines of functionality. In our extra-vagance we allow our words to wander, we stand open to our responsibility of making-sense and we squander our communicative abundance. We give our words freely in an attempt to make sense in common.

5.4 Still to Come, or Whitman on Democracy

> In the intertwining of destinies, each comes to stand caringly, thoughtfully with others. This standing with others is a going-along-the-way together. It is a sharing of life.
>
> Les Amis, *Commemorating Epimetheus*

Where Emerson and Thoreau offer an account of the human condition, it is our thinking with Walt Whitman that makes the connection between a hyperbolic and testimonial understanding of communication to democracy and utopian practice explicit. Among this collection of thinkers, it is Whitman who is most often left out of philosophical discussion; indeed, not even Cavell moves to include him as an amateur who brings into question the way in which philosophy practiced. Nevertheless, there is precedent to consider Whitman an exemplary figure for philosophy. Oscar Wilde, ever the arbiter of good taste and a constant touchstone in this project, wrote of Whitman's poetry:

> Certainly in Walt Whitman's views there is a largeness of vision, a healthy sanity, and a fine ethical purpose… He is the herald to a new era. As a man he is the

> precursor of a fresh type. He is a factor in the heroic and spiritual evolution of the human being. If Poetry has passed him by, Philosophy will take note of him.[64]

Thankfully, poetry has had the good sense not to pass him by, but it is worth our while to examine what Whitman can contribute to a philosophy of communication, and in particular a philosophy of communicative ethics. To do so, let us focus on three elements within Whitman's poetry and prose: (1) the to-come structure of democracy; (2) the role of the poet in inaugurating this democracy to come; and (3) the fragmentary nature of language that the poet must take up in this democratic project.

The democracy about which Whitman offers hints and suggestions in "Democratic Vistas" is not a democracy we readily see. This democracy did not exist during Whitman's time and it is no more present today. Let us be reminded of Whitman's warning: "The United States are destined either to surmount the gorgeous history of feudalism, or else prove to be the most tremendous failure of all time."[65] I for one am still holding out hope for the former, even if at times we appear to still be on the verge of utter disaster. The democracy for which Whitman and we still hold out hope is a democracy to come, residing in the future, and now just in its embryonic condition. Consequently, "we presume to write, as it were, upon things that exist not, and travel by maps unmade, and a blank."[66] It is unclear whether Whitman believed this democracy would ever come into existence, but that makes his writing no less powerful. For our purposes, we can approach Whitman's understanding of democracy as a kind of utopian longing that pulls us

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[64] Oscar Wilde, "The Gospel According to Walt Whitman," in *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002), 810.
[65] Whitman, "Democratic Vistas," in *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002), 903.
[66] Whitman, "Democratic Vistas," 957.

forward into the future and gives us a sense of what needs to be accomplished. Conditions for democracy offer us constellations by which we might guide ourselves. In this sense, and drawing our insights once more from Derrida, democracy takes on a messianic or quasi-transcendental structure. Democracy, like testimony, has the structure of a promise, a promise that can never be actualized in full. Democracy harbors within it the idea of perfectibility—the perfectibility of relations between every other as equal and just, perfect sovereignty—that cannot be realized. The realization is always hyperbolically beyond the conditions at hand, and for Derrida ontologically so. These relations are never perfected because they are always open to change, open to the singularly other that cannot be made equal with all. In other words, for a democracy to function, it needs to be open but in its openness it cannot ever be perfected but always only reiterated. Such openness is predicated within the structure of democracy, yet likewise it precludes its possibility. We see glimpses of this in Whitman's prose. He writes in "Democratic Vistas" that two principles are at work: (1) the principle of the average and (2) the principle of individuality. The average refers to the levelling function of democracy—the making of each equal to another regardless of their differences. Individuality is its counterpart. Individuality, "the pride and centripetal isolation of a human being in himself—identity—personalism," marks the absolutely singular uniqueness of any given individual.[67] These two tendencies within democracy exist constantly in a state of tension, and if we take Derrida's position on this, this tension makes democracy itself impossible. Moreover, it is the promise of democracy, in its impossibility, that pulls us forward in attempt after attempt to make good on that promise.

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[67] Whitman, "Democratic Vistas," 958.

As a promise, it calls upon us, appeals to us, and asks that it be realized. It asks that together we bring it into existence.

But what exactly is calling upon us? For Whitman, democracy is not a political form of governance, not something that could be seated in a nation's capitol, but rather a way of comporting oneself towards others. Democracy is an ethic of responsibility which each individual would need to take up as his or her own. It is predicated on the openness of oneself toward others as a position of vulnerability and exposure. Democracy relies on the "copious production of perfect characters among the people."[68] A challenging task, indeed. To begin examining what such a perfect character could look like, let us turn once more to the figure of the poet.

In his expansive thought, and like Emerson, Whitman has a particular understanding of the role and function of the poet. The poet, for Whitman, is the maker of a nation. Ever committed to championing the highborn as equally as the low, Whitman argues that it is the poet—and not the politician or the reformist—who inaugurates a nation, and in particular a democratic nation. The poet draws together the sympathies of a people and amid these sympathies (these instances of being-together) calls forth a kind of national ethos. In the poet,

> past and present and future are not disjoined but joined. The greatest poet forms the consistence of what is to be from what has been and is. He drags the dead out of their coffins and stands them again on their feet…he says to the past, Rise and

[68] Whitman, "Democratic Vistas," 959.

> walk before me that I may realize you. He learns the lesson…he places himself where the future becomes present.[69]

In other words, the poet is historical—she or he in their very dwelling culls together the ecstasies of time, gives justification to the past so that the dead will have not died in vain, and makes room for the future. Not only makes room for the future but, on Whitman's account, stands as the space where the future becomes present. In this way, the poet puts the world in place. Said within the language of this project, the poet acknowledges the hyperbolicity inherent in the temporality that we are and announces it to the world.

Furthermore, the poet brings forth a prophetic literature, turning us again to the nature of democracy to come. Such literature shows "the elevating and etherealizing ideas of the unknown and of unreality must be brought forward with authority, as they are the legitimate heirs of the known, and of reality, and at least as great as their parents."[70] A fiction, and experiment, as we have been saying all along, has as great a weight (and if not more so) than any reality. Everything needs to be re-stated and re-sung in a manner fitting to our condition, and we must, if necessary, use the lies of art when correct words will not do. For perhaps Nature will indeed mirror Art after all.

The poet sings not about herself, as one might imagine in a poem such as Whitman's "Song of Myself," but the poet brings something into existence, in this case a clarification of being-together with others. That is to say, in singing about oneself, one comes to see that she is always already with others. Indeed, "Song of Myself" is foremost a kind of cataloguing the poet makes of those he finds around him, from the "little one

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[69] Whitman, "Preface 1855—*Leaves of Grass*, First Edition," in *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings*, 623.
[70] Whitman, "Democratic Vistas," 985.

asleep in its cradle" to the runaway slave, from the fare-collector to the bride, from the opium-eater "with rigid head and just-open'd lips" to the suicide, even noting where the pistol had fallen.[71] Whitman leaves no member of society unrecognized as all are with us, always, even if they are often overlooked. His very articulation of their presence is in some sense a political act, as poetry is for everyone, not for an elite few. The word applies equally to all. In this way Whitman highlights the conception of being-with or being-together that we find at work in fundamental ontology, it is simply said in a more democratic tone.

Recalling Vattimo, the poet also provides an aperture of being. The poet speaks the tradition that she is. Through their exposure and radical openness, the poet voices all. The poet "leaves room ahead of himself" so as to be the open space for the disclosure of new worldly understanding.[72] In this respect, the poet is not so far from the prophet (which, perhaps, is among the reasons why Whitman claims with a robust national poet priests will no longer be needed). Moreover, the poet attempts to articulate, in a way that might be understandable to more than a few, the underlying tendencies of a population—in Whitman's case, he highlights the democratic capacity within everyone. A poet could certainly choose an alternative theme, Hölderlin for example focused on a sense of homeland with regard to the ancient Greek context. Nevertheless, Whitman gives voice to the democratic project in such a way that highlights the role of voice and the contributions each has to the making of a great nation. We shall return to this theme shortly.

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[71] Whitman, "Song of Myself," in *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002), 32 and 38.
[72] Whitman, "Preface 1855—*Leaves of Grass*, First Edition," 622.

Let us pause for a moment, however, as Whitman is not claiming that this is what poets have done. On the contrary, not all who call themselves poets genuinely are. Instead, he is articulating that of which poets are capable. The poet, as the lover of language, has the power to speak in a way that extends beyond everyday communicative exchanges. However, as we saw with Emerson, the mark of the poet is not the conventions of a particular genre—it is not the ability to write in verse, or even so-called prose poems—instead, poetry is liberated to a variety of communicative situations. Philosophy of a certain kind is poetry. An artwork might be poetic. So too with literature. Whitman carries this further, we ourselves can be poetry. He writes, in the preface to *Leaves of Grass* in a litany that offers a series of new commandments: "your very flesh shall be a great poem and have the richest fluency not only in its words but in the silent lines of its lips and face and between the lashes of your eyes and in every motion and joint of your body."[73] Poetry, and living poetically, means cultivating oneself in a manner loving, receptive, and just. In other words, the very cultivation of ourselves is an attestation and a poetic event. Our concept of testimony takes from Whitman this vital lesson: the other whom we face in conversation must be taken as she is—conversation is a companionship, a traveling the way together rather than a leading ahead. The other is as much a poem as we are.

For a nation to be prosperous and properly democratic three conditions must be met on Whitman's account: first, there need to be recorded foundational political rights for all people; second, a material prosperity that accounts for the physical well being of others; and lastly and with his most unique insight, arising from these two conditions a

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[73] Whitman, "Preface 1855—*Leaves of Grass*, First Edition," 622.

third, a "native expression-spirit" or a national literature.[74] National literature need not be understood as a kind of patriotic, propagandistic project but a style of language.

> We see, fore-indicated, amid these prospects and hopes, new law-forces of spoken and written language—not merely the pedagogue-forms, correct, regular, familiar with precedents, make for matters of outside propriety, fine words, thoughts definitely told out—but a language fann'd by the breath of Nature, which leaps overhead, cares mostly for impetus and effects, and for what it plants and invigorates to grow—tallies life and character, and seldomer tells a thing than suggests or necessitates it.[75]

This readiness for language of a new force is a readiness for hyperbole, an acknowledgment that we are always stretching beyond ourselves, ever wandering beyond the confines of our conditions. Returning to our quasi-transcendental theme, this stretching is transcendence in the sense that we extend beyond ourselves, but simultaneously fully within immanence. The Other who is with whom we extend beyond, is the radically other who we encounter everyday. Remaining open to them is, thus, the practice of democracy as a communicative ethic. It is in such a spirit that Whitman dreams in a dream of a city of friends. Encountering the other is a practice of love, a loving struggle to be sure, as we learned from Jaspers, but a love all the same. As Whitman writes, it is this love "seen every hour in the actions of the men in that city,/And

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[74] Whitman, "Democratic Vistas," 977.
[75] Whitman, "Democratic Vistas," 992.

in all their looks and words."[76] The communicative ethics that testimony suggests highlights this being-together in loving struggle.

Whitman, through both his philosophy of poetry as well as his poetic practice, gives voice to the fragmentary nature of communication as testimony. In "Democratic Vistas," Whitman time and again utilizes hinting and fragmentary language. He writes, "Let us, even if fragmentarily, throw forth a short direct or indirect suggestion" of another America.[77] "The clues are inferential…at best we can only offer suggestions, comparisons, circuits," he says, giving credence to the value of hints.[78] What does a hint do, such that we might see it as a exemplar of testimony? A hint offers a vantage point, a vista of possible interpretations for its meanings, but it does not demand a single reading. A hint is hermeneutically ambiguous and flexible as a result. Hints provide just enough for us to work through their meaning on our own (which is to say together, as our habits of interpretation are intersubjective and historical through and through). The hint remains open and is, as a hint, unable to be closed; likewise with clues and glimpses—they put us on our way, they provide a passage for understanding, but they do not complete the task themselves.

We see this at work especially in the sensuous language Whitman employs throughout his poetry. For our purposes we shall focus in the main on "Song of Myself," but nearly all of his poems are characterized by a sensitivity to the way in which world is disclosed. The song that launches from his tongue circles around through all of his

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[76] Whitman, "I Dream'd in a Dream," in *Leaves of Grass and Other Writings* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002), 113.
[77] Whitman, "Democratic Vistas," 943.
[78] Whitman, "Democratic Vistas," 972.

senses—nothing is left untouched by poetry. He breathes in the fragrance of himself and lets the atmosphere fill his mouth, its power nearly drives him mad. He asks of his reader that they join him and allow themselves to see and hear of their own accord. Whitman does not offer a ready-made understanding of the world that surrounds him, but provides an invitation for each to determine it for herself. He notes what he sees and leaves nothing unrecorded, even and especially that to which we are prone to turn our eye. He hears "what living and buried speech is always vibrating here" and allows it to resonate with him.[79] It is this living and buried speech, always vibrating, to which we too must turn our ears. It is the vibration of tradition and testimony, the vibration of being-together. The world appears to him also as a series of hieroglyphs, "all are written to me, and I must get what the writing means."[80] The poet of democracy is hermeneutic all the way down. He comes to understand these hieroglyphs—this meaning that was made by others—and translates them into a new tongue more suitable for his time. Such is the responsibility we all bear.

Moreover, when the poet testifies, the "voice goes after what my eyes cannot reach, with the twirl of my tongue I encompass worlds and volumes of worlds."[81] The poet speaks that which is beyond her and in doing so brings it near. Yet the condition of language, of words is such: "Wider and wider they spread, expanding, always expanding, outward and outward and forever outward."[82] Like the circles about which Emerson spoke, and the extravagance of Thoreau, for Whitman the world continually promulges

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[79] Whitman, "Song of Myself," 32.
[80] Whitman, "Song of Myself," 42.
[81] Whitman, "Song of Myself," 48.
[82] Whitman, "Song of Myself," 71.

from itself in ever greater expanses. What he witnesses is always in excess of his senses of it, he gets but a hint that points to the larger mystery beyond him. Meaning is boundless, limitless, and always already on its way waiting for someone to come along to give it voice. “Urge and urge and urge,/ Always the procreant urge of the world” Whitman writes.[83] It is into this space, the space wherein we make sense in common, the space wherein the world calls upon us to give it voice, that we must turn ourselves over with abandon.

[83] Whitman, “Song of Myself,” 27.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION, OR OPENING ONCE MORE

Testimony highlights the uncertainty at the heart of communication. With the death of god and the consequent lack of foundation upon which to ground our judgments, uncertainty and ambiguity permeate our dwelling in the world. Our responses to this uncertainty has, in the main, been two-fold: (1) a strengthening commitment to orthodoxy and certainty in light of its absence—fundamentalism and (2) a resignation to uncertainty beyond one's self certainty and a deep abiding sense of suspicion—cynicism. We find ourselves oscillating between these poles and in need of a more fitting response. Both fundamentalism and cynicism shape our interpretations of our dwelling-together, consequently shaping our ethical and political engagements with each other. It is against this hermeneutic backdrop that we must twist-a-way.

The way we have articulated in this project, one way among many others, is to reorient our thinking about communication. In particular, we have emphasized the testimonial core within communication. As we learned from Heidegger, communication and judgment are closely linked; as a result, I am hopeful that in thinking about communication otherwise we will disclose additional resources for judgment. In order to make a judgment, or at least a judgment wherein we feel a sense of fortitude in our decision, we desire full knowledge about the issue. This full knowledge, however, will never arrive. It is in the face of this uncertainty that we testify. Ricoeur speaks to this

when he writes attestation is "a kind of understanding, but one that cannot be reduced to knowing something."[1] By this we understand that in testifying we rely on our hermeneutic understanding, an understanding developed from out of our shared existence, but this understanding is never certain as our shared existence is always infused with the force of finitude. Our testifying, then, is tempered with humility.

As I have argued, testimony is marked by the structure of the hyperbolic across all of its dimensions and it is this hyperbolic force that most clearly discloses the testimonial condition of communication. This argument is an ontological one. Communication *is* testimony, it takes on the structure of testifying before any linguistic act takes place. However, the uncertainty that results from the dissolution of foundationalist metaphysics brings this ontological condition into clear view. In other words, although this has long been the case with communication our current historical aperture makes it more readily seen. Modernity brings testifying into clearer focus.

In an effort to summarize and take one more pass at clarifying our communicative circumstances, let us move through the moments of a communicative event in a more systematic fashion to provide greater analytical clarity. This of course risks reifying a dynamic process into a static model; however, let us undertake this task as a heuristic rather than an ultimate description. As a general framework for understanding communication, we shall take Calvin Schrag's wonderfully basic account of communicative praxis in *Communicative Praxis and the Space of Subjectivity*. Every communicative act is grounded in three moments: reference to reality, hermeneutic self-implicature, and a rhetorical moment. He simplifies this claim in saying that every act of

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[1] Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, 350.

communication is about something (reference), by someone (hermeneutic self-implicature) for someone (rhetorical moment). My contribution has been to demonstrate that all three of these moments are suffused with hyperbole—understood as the openness, excess, and inexhaustibility—and it is through understanding this hyperbolic saturation that we can make sense of Derrida's claim that testimony governs the entire social sphere.

Every communicative action makes reference to reality, that is, it is about something. The about which of communication is what we might call its content. However, this reference to reality is radically destabilized by the lack of a foundation to knowledge. Rather than the correspondence between word and thing, we have meaning caught up in a hermeneutic texture that necessarily exceeds whatever is trying to be said. In other words, the horizon of possible meaning is always greater than that which is said or decided upon and the possibility of something being meaningful is determined by the larger web of reference to which it belongs. Phenomenologically astute hermeneutics has shown us why this is the case. What is said is always an interpretation developed from out of the lifeworld or the larger hermeneutic horizon against or through which any specific utterance can be voiced. In other words, our communicative acts find their direction and are buoyed within this horizon. Furthermore, our testimonies always push up against the limits of speech in attempt to exceed them, regardless of the content of what is being said. In this way, language takes on a quasi-transcendental—i.e., hyperbolic—condition. As our early examination of Derrida's *différance* disclosed, our saying is always deferred and differed; there is no pure presence but a dispersion of meanings and traces that are thrown beyond presence and make any understanding of presence and absence possible. What the hyperbole at work in communication discloses

is that there is no ultimate meaning beyond the circulation of meaning that takes place between each of us in our interactions with one another.

Every communicative action involves hermeneutic self-implicature, that is, it is undertaken by someone. Here perhaps the testimonial condition of communication is most apparent as someone must testify to their experience. However, the hyperbolic is at work in multiple ways. Like the reality to which we refer, the subject who speaks has been radically decentered—such was the work of fundamental ontology and philosophical hermeneutics. No longer a stable cogito but a more hermeneutically embodied figure, the speaker herself is the occasion for speaking into/as the world. As Schrag writes, of the subject "it is not an entity at all, but rather an event or happening that continues the conversation and social practices of mankind and inscribes its contributions on their textures."[2] The subject is not the ground of what is said, but what is said is spoken through her. As did Heidegger, so too did Emerson and Whitman help us understand this claim. Language, which exceeds our subjectivity, speaks through us and in the process of that speaking the speaker is implicated in what is said. Furthermore, as the projection of one's possibilities, the self who speaks also speaks into the space of actions yet to be taken. The self is, so to speak, always on its way. Said otherwise, the self never has a last word.

Every communicative action involves a rhetorical moment; it is for someone. Our discussion of hermeneutical self-implicature has already made this clear as the self is always implicated via its co-constitution with others. Said differently, the self comes into

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[2] Calvin Schrag, *Communicative Praxis and the Space of Subjectivity* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2003), 121.

being as being-with. We are always already outside of ourselves (if we think the self as an encapsulated cogito) in our relation to others. As Jaspers helped us to see, I am only because we are. Yet philosophy still needs to be rethought, again and again, from the position of the "we" and "with" rather than the "I." As Nancy puts it in *Being Singular Plural*, "there is no other meaning than the meaning of circulation. But this circulation goes in all directions at once, in all the directions of all the space-times opened by presence to presence."[3] Meaning is because it is the finitude shared between us. This between is a stretching and a tending—a movement toward limits—wherein meaning occurs as finitude, each time irreducibly singular as the disclosure of being. None of this is possible without us already being-together.

Testimony marks the inexhaustibility of communication. When we testify it is clear to us that what we wish to say might be said in many ways but that we must nevertheless choose a way, this way. We thereby acknowledge that there is no final word, but an endless series of beginnings and openings. In this way, testimony takes on an aphoristic hue. Testimony begins with the mystery that we are—the mystery that we are as openness—and from out of this mystery makes meaningful the world. It is this mystery to which language returns again and again and that makes anything like speaking a dictum (or exchanging facts) possible.

Dwelling in the world together, being-with, communicative ethics, democracy—by whatever name they go—all are suffused with testimony. Moreover, it is in acknowledging this truth, this fundamental openness to the world, that we might find a

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[3] Jean-Luc Nancy, *Being Singular Plural*, trans. Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Bryne (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 3.

space to twist-a-way. The democracy of which Whitman spoke, this democracy to come wherein we might approach every other as a friend rather than a threat, is an ethical relation that allows itself to be buoyed not merely by the weight of factuality, but the force of mystery. We have encountered this mystery throughout this project; we found it in our thinking about communication and we allowed ourselves to dwell within this space in our reading of Emerson, Thoreau, and Whitman, taking from them a particular philosophical approach to theorizing communication.

We turned, both in the content of this project as well as the epigraphs which guided it to aesthetics. We did so because it is aesthetics (called here by many names: hyperbole, aphorism, poetry, and the like), through overstating the case, that we might have the chance of glimpsing the truth of our condition. Such has been the lesson we have investigated, that the lie of art—be it poetry, literature, or art more broadly thought—points us to a greater truth, in this case the truth of testimony and the hyperbolic conditions of communication. Acknowledging this condition asks of us that we are extravagant in the hope we might give voice to the truths of which we are convinced, that we might make sense in common for the sake of the future already on its way.

Let us recall Oscar Wilde once more in his "The Decay of Lying." He disclosed there, through an artistic form of his own, that the relationship between art and nature is more complicated than we think. It is not art which mirrors nature, but the opposite: nature mirrors art. Nature conforms to the artistic perceptions we have of it, to the interpretive habits and questions we bring to it. In other words, the world discloses itself through the interpretations (the sense) we make of it. Perhaps this is an exaggeration of

sorts and the lavishness of artistic whim. It is an instance wherein Wilde squanders the communicative potential with which he finds himself. Yet in its wandering beyond the bounds of our daily experiences it offers a source of utopian potential that remains amidst the ever narrowing horizons fundamentalism and cynicism. Whatever redemption we might seek will need to be sought together. In tempering our understanding of communication by turning to testimony as the conditions for its possibility, by bringing into relief our dwelling in the world together, by bearing the responsibility of making sense in common, and by giving voice to the hyperbole that we are, perhaps—just perhaps—we might say the world anew.

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2009-2010	Teaching Fellow, Department of Communication, University of Pittsburgh

AWARDS AND HONORS

2012-2016	Ross Fellowship, Purdue University
2015	Alan H. Monroe Graduate Scholar Award
2015	Bruce Kendall Award for Excellence in Teaching
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2014	Participant of the French American Cultural Exchange, Université de Paris Ouest Nanterre/Purdue University
2013	Top Student Paper, Philosophy of Communication Division of the National Communication Association
2009	Routledge Studentship, National Communication Association
2008-2009	Provost's Humanities Fellowship, University of Pittsburgh
2003-2007	Arizona State University President's Scholarship
2007	Barrett Honors College Distinguished Student Award for Excellence in Achievement
2005	Communication Studies Outstanding Student Award
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2004	1st Place Short Fiction, *Fusion Literary Magazine*

SCHOLARSHIP

Journal Articles

Sturgess, J. N. (forthcoming, 2016). Drawing from Heidegger: Dasein and the question of communication. *Empedocles: European Journal for Philosophy of Communication, 7*(1).

Sturgess, J. N. (2014). Death, rebirth, and a sense of ease: Hermeneutic truth after Heidegger. *Studia Philosophiae Christianae, 50*(1), 29-49.

Ramsey, R. E., & Sturgess, J. N. (2011). The strange leisure of the snake-bitten: Listening to the wonder of Socrates. *Listening 46*, 5-20.

Book Chapters

Ramsey, R. E., & Sturgess, J. N. (2015). Speaking freely: Thinking with Camus and Beauvoir toward a philosophy of communication. In B. Sleasman (Ed.), *Albert Camus & Philosophy of Communication: Making Sense in an Age of Absurdity*. Madison, NJ: Farleigh Dickenson Press.

Sturgess, J. N. (under contract). Despite what we may have heard: Conversations between hermeneutics and critical theory. In E. Garrett (Ed.), *Communication as Loving Struggle: Love, Family, and Social Responsibility in the Technological Age.* New York, NY: Springer Press.

Conference Papers (* indicates competitively selected)

Sturgess, J. N. & Ramsey, R. E. (2015, November). *Speaking freely: Thinking with Camus and Beauvoir toward a philosophy of communication*. Paper to be presented to the Philosophy of Communication Division at the annual convention of the National Communication Association, Las Vegas, NV.*

Sturgess, J. N. (2015, June). *"I am a fragment, and this is a fragment of me": Emerson, Deleuze, and the fragmentation of experience.* Paper presented to the 2nd Biennial Department of Communication & Rhetorical Studies Philosophy of Communication Conference, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA.*

Sturgess, J. N. (2014, November). *The courage to understand: A hermeneutic approach to advocacy and the Human Library Organization*. Paper presented to the Philosophy of Communication Division at the annual convention of the National Communication Association, Chicago, IL. *

Sturgess, J. N. (2014, November). *Doing philosophy of communication with Calvin O. Schrag: Roundtable on the influence of a philosopher on the field of communication*. Paper presented to the Philosophy of Communication Division at the annual convention of the National Communication Association, Chicago, IL.*

Sturgess, J. N. (2014, September). *Remainders and rejoinders: Communication as embodied testimony*. Paper presented at the Pittsburgh Continental Philosophy Network's 1st Annual Conference, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA.*

Sturgess, J. N. (2014, June). *Book blocs and the safeguarding of study: A critical hermeneutic approach to social movement theory.* Paper presented at the 13th Annual National Communication Ethics Conference, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA. *

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Sturgess, J. N. (2013, November). *Living hermeneutics: Mikhail Bahktin's dialogic ethics of response*. Paper presented to the Communication Ethics Division at the annual convention of the National Communication Association, Washington D.C. *

Sturgess, J. N. (2013, February). S*hock treatment: Dignity, privacy, and the obscene in Wiseman's* Titicut Follies*.* Paper presented to the Purdue Graduate Student Conference on Communication Research, Purdue University, West Lafayette, IN. *

Sturgess, J. N. (2010, June). *We must love understanding to understand love: Hermeneutics, critical theory, and communicative ethics.* Paper presented at the Communication Ethics Conference, Duquesne University, Pittsburgh, PA. *

Sturgess, J. N. (2009, November). *Rethinking truth and rhetoric for the sake of ethics: Examining Heidegger's conception of aletheia.* Paper presented to the Philosophy of Communication Division at the annual convention of the National Communication Association, Chicago, IL. *

Sturgess, J. N. (2009, October). *Never again Auschwitz: Pedagogy, liberation, and learning to love*. Paper presented at the Conference of the Coalition of Women Scholars in the History of Rhetoric, East Lansing, MI.*

Ramsey, R. E., & Sturgess, J. N. (2008, November). *Nearer than you think: Eleven openings to a philosophy of communication*. Paper presented at the annual convention of the National Communication Association, San Diego, CA. *

Invited Talks

Sturgess, J. N. (2015, March 19). *Taking a hint: Coming home to the art of communication*. Lecture presented at the Hermeneutics and Homecoming Lecture Series at Barrett, the Honors College at Arizona State University at the West Campus, Phoenix, AZ.

GRANTS

PRF Graduate School Summer Research Grant, Purdue University, Summer 2015
Includes a half-time summer research appointment, approximately $3000

Communication Graduate Student Association Travel Grant, Purdue University, Fall 2014
Includes a $100 competitive travel stipend

Communication Graduate Student Association Travel Grant, Purdue University, Fall 2013

Includes a $100 competitive travel stipend

RESEARCH APPOINTMENTS

Research Team Member, Patrice Buzzanell and Steve Wilson, Fall 2015

This research project examines ways to help cultivate and support a local culture that values and promotes life-long learning among all community members, with a special focus on children (ages 6-8). I assisted in collecting qualitative data and underwent training for working with children.

Assistant to the Editor, Philosophy/Communication Book Series, Fall 2004-Spring 2007

During the time of my assistantship, the series was held by Purdue University Press. Currently, Duquesne University Press publishes the series. Since the series' inception, Dr. Ramsey has remained the editor.

Research Assistant for Dr. Ramsey Eric Ramsey, Barrett Honors College and Department of Communication Studies, Arizona State University at the West Campus, Fall 2004-Spring 2007.

Research Assistant for Dr. Sharon Kirsch, Department of Communication Studies, Arizona State University at the West Campus, Summer 2007.

TEACHING EXPERIENCE (* indicates instructor of record)

Detailed course descriptions and evaluations available upon request

Graduate Teaching Assistant, Purdue University (2013-present)

COM 217: Science Writing and Presentation*, Fall 2013, Spring 2014, Summer 2014, Fall 2014, Spring 2015, Fall 2015, Spring 2016

COM 204: Critical Approaches to Communication, Fall 2014, Fall 2015 (Teaching Assistant)

COM 312: Rhetoric in the Western World, Fall 2013 and Fall 2014 (Teaching Assistant), Spring 2016 instructor of record

Faculty Associate, Arizona State University (2011-2012)

COM 422: Advanced Argumentation, Summer 2012*

COM 454: Television Studies and Criticism, Spring 2012*

COM 457: New Media, Spring 2012*

COM 394: Storytelling and Oral History, Spring 2012*

COM 429: Semiotics and Visual Communication, Fall 2011*

COM 225: Public Speaking, Spring 2011, Fall 2011*

COM 430: Leadership in Group Communication, Spring 2011*

Teaching Fellow, University of Pittsburgh (2009-2010)
COMMRC 0520: Public Speaking, Spring 2010*
COMMRC 0520: Public Speaking, Fall 2009*

Teaching Awards:
Bruce Kendall Award for Teaching Excellence, Purdue University, 2015.

Teaching Certifications:
Diversity Inclusion Certification, Department of Philosophy, Purdue University, Spring 2015.
SafeZone Training, Purdue University, Spring 2016.

Teaching Assistantships:
COM 204: Critical Perspectives on Communication, Dr. Josh Boyd, Purdue University, Fall 2014 and Fall 2015.
COM 312: Rhetoric and the Western World, Dr. Robin Clair, Purdue University, Fall 2013 and Fall 2014.
CMN 294: Communication as the Art of Understanding, Dr. Ramsey Eric Ramsey, Arizona State University, Spring 2007.
HON 294: Conversations Becoming a Community of Scholars, Dr. Ramsey Eric Ramsey, Arizona State University, Fall 2005.

Invited Course Lectures:
"Thinking-with Heidegger on the Truth of Rhetoric" for CMN 598: Communication Ethics, Fall 2010.
"What Stories Do We Have to Tell?: Examining the Force of Narrative" and "Nothing Less Than a Story" for HON 171: The Human Event, Fall 2007.
"Outliving Objectivity: Reading Linda Weiner and Ramsey Eric Ramsey's *Leaving Us to Wonder* as an Act of Hermeneutic Survival" for CMN 294: Communication as the Art of Understanding, Spring 2007.
Writing Workshop for CMN 294: Communication as the Art of Understanding, Spring 2007.
"Now More than Ever: Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and the Necessity of Living Well Together" for HON 171: The Human Event, Fall 2006.
"As Far as We Can Tell: Understanding Narrative by Way of Cinema" for HON 294: Conversations Becoming a Community of Scholars, Fall 2005.